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LETTERS

Nader in history

Congratulations on the fine article about Ralph Nader ["Ralph Nader Reconsidered," Jonathan Rowe, March]. In fact, the article makes the valid point that Nader has stood for much more than simply consumer advocacy; as Rowe points out, Nader not only has saved countless thousands of lives, he has also done what he could through example and education to make the public more aware of its responsibilities as citizens in a democracy which claims to stand for social justice.

Naturally, as Rowe quotes Lewis Powell as saying, Nader is considered "perhaps the most effective antagonist of American business." What American business leaders need to consider is this: what will be the price for the kind of corporate irresponsibility and greed which is pervasive today in this nation's boardrooms, and who will pay the price?

I'll make a bet that the judgment of history will be far kinder to Nader than to Calvin Coolidge and his modern-day clone, Ronald Reagan.

CONNIE JOHNSON
Syria, Virginia

Plain vanilla and you

As an investment banker who deals in "plain vanilla" bond issues, I feel compelled to respond to your essay regarding local government debt ["The Government Debt Racket," Paul Glastris, February]. I must both praise and criticize your article.

First, the praise! Your grasp of the problems caused by "private-purpose" tax exempt bonds cannot be challenged. *The* culprit in the municipal marketplace is private-purpose financing. Such financing has indeed forced borrowing costs to be higher for all other traditional financing needs and has clouded the true nature of the credit which supports traditional debt. There is *no* public purpose justification for the tax exempt financing of corporate America.

You err, however, in suggesting the elimination of the tax exemption of municipal debt. "Exemption" is an improper term. The Constitution guarantees separation of powers between the federal and local governments. The Supreme Court has affirmed that guarantee. Just as interest income on municipal debt is not taxable for federal purposes, neither is interest income on debt of the federal government taxable by the states or their political subdivisions.

The most efficient method with which to end the abuse of "innovative" revenue bonds for hospitals, housing, pollution control, and other questionable purposes is a more responsible, narrow view of public purpose by officials of municipal governments. The issue really is a matter of judgment as to what constitutes a "local government public purpose." Can you conclude that decent housing, clean air, a college education, and health care costs are not human needs which are the responsibility of local government?

I conclude they are not; however, it is the business of local government to make these decisions, and the Constitution gives those rights to the states. Much better that local officials make a "wrong" decision than federal officials make that decision.

CYRUS F. RILEE JR.
Albuquerque, New Mexico

Smoking debate

I'm disappointed you had to indulge in yellow journalism by printing David Owen's antismoking tirade ["The Cigarette Companies: How They Get Away with Murder," March] because I subscribe to *The Washington Monthly* for its open-mindedness. The antismoking crusade is awash in exaggeration and statistical obfuscation, but Owen's article is state of the art. For instance: "smoking now causes. . . 30 percent of all cancer cases." That is a sweeping statement, totally without proof, not to mention unprovable.

How about: "40 percent [of all smokers] don't know it causes most lung cancer." If there is anyone in America who hasn't heard or read that by now he is either deaf and blind or living under Mt. Rushmore. After years of weekly cancer scares that later studies refute, 40 percent of smokers may not believe smoking causes cancer, but they certainly have heard about it. Then there is my favorite: "as many as 5,000 deaths [every year] among nonsmokers who breath in smoke that others exhale." That truly reckless charge questions the credibility of the whole antismoking campaign.

JOHN F. BYE
Dade City, Florida

That was a great article by David Owen on cigarette murder, but he overlooks one good argument against the Tobacco Institute's contention that the tobacco industry benefits the economy because it employs 393,000 Americans directly and 1.6 million indirectly: If smokers didn't buy cigarettes, they could spend their money on other (more useful) things and thereby employ about the same number of people that way.

STEVEN CORD
Indiana, Pennsylvania

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AMERICAN HOSTAGES IN IRAN

The Conduct of a Crisis

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Harold H. Saunders **John E. Hoffman, Jr.**
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Published monthly except combined July/August issue by The Washington Monthly Company, 1711 Connecticut Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009 (202) 462-0128.

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ISSN 0043-0633.

Subscription rates: U.S. and possessions: one year, $30; two years, $56; three years, $77. Additional charges per year, foreign subscriptions: Canada, $3; other, $25 air mail, $3 surface mail. Back issues, $3. Send all remittances and correspondence concerning subscriptions, undelivered copies, and changes of address to 1711 Connecticut Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C., 20009. For change of address, please provide four weeks' notice and return old address label. New subscriptions only: 1-800-341-1522. Postmaster: Send form 3579 to The Washington Monthly, 1711 Connecticut Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009.

The Washington Monthly is indexed in the Book Review Index, Political Science Abstracts, Public Affairs Information Service, the Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature, the Social Science Index, and Ulrich's International Periodicals Directory, and may be obtained on microfilm from University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 48106.

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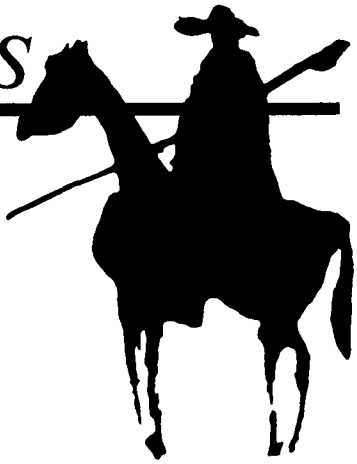
TILTING AT WINDMILLS



"I hope when I'm older I'll have as much money as my father does, but I don't think I'll work as hard."

Those words, spoken by a college sophomore, came from a survey of children of corporate executives conducted by *The Wall Street Journal*. The children feel, according to the *Journal*, that "wealth is a necessity, not a luxury. . . .The springboard to everything else. . .you need money to be happy."

The *Journal* also questioned the parents, and they confirmed the survey's findings about their children:

"My son wants to go into business," says one father. "And he would like to have the same or a higher income than I do but work a lot less hard to get it."

This frightens me. A healthy society would reverse these priorities, emphasizing a commitment to one's work and a relative indifference to wealth. . . .

Another sign of an unhealthy society comes from research into the speech of black Americans by Dr. William Labov, a professor of linguistics at the University of Pennsylvania. The black vernacular appears, according to Labov's study, to be steadily diverging from white speech. This would not happen, the linguist says, if blacks and whites were not increasingly living apart from one another: "Separate development [of speech patterns] is only made possible by separate living."

Many black children almost never talk to a white person before the age of six, when they enter school, Labov told William Stevens of *The New York Times*. . . .

Colonel James Burton of the Pentagon's Office of Testing and Evaluation, decided to test the Bradley Fighting Vehicle, which has been attacked by many defense critics, including us. The Army plans to buy enough of these "battle taxis" (giant Winnebagos is what the critics call them) at $2 million each to carry 70,000 infantrymen into battle if war breaks out in Europe. Since each Bradley carries only six infantrymen, the cost of this undertaking will not be modest.

But there are other problems. Soldiers tend to get car sick from the motion of the ten-foot-high Bradley as it speeds across the countryside. Its armor "can stop almost everything," writes Lars-Erik Nelson of the New York *Daily News*, but critics allege, "it cannot stop what the Russians are most likely to shoot at it: rocket-propelled grenades."

Burton sought to test the vulnerability of the Bradley by seeing what would happen when, loaded with ammunition and fuel, it was hit by a rocket-propelled grenade. The Army didn't like this idea at all but finally agreed to a test in which there was no live ammunition aboard and the fuel tanks were only half full. Instead of firing a grenade into the tank, the Army set off a charge beside it. Less than a rigorous test, you might say. The result:

"It went up like a skyrocket," said one Pentagon source to Nelson.

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"Keg of dynamite," agreed another.

Colonel Burton pointed out that in previous tryouts, the testers did everything they could to help the Bradley survive: deliberately shooting at its strongest points, aiming to miss its fuel and ammunition areas, and filling the fuel tanks with water, not fuel. In one test, the uniforms on the dummies inside caught fire. So the Army sprayed them with water. They still caught fire. The Army then decided to strip the uniforms from the dummies. "Are our soldiers supposed to go into combat naked?" one critic asked Nelson.

How did the Defense Department react to these test results? Did they cancel the Bradley? Of course not. They offered Colonel Burton a choice of retirement or an assignment in Alaska....

How do the women who participate in the Virginia Slims tennis tournaments justify hustling cigarettes? "Whenever I think of Virginia Slims," Chris Evert Lloyd told *Business Week*. "I don't think of cigarettes—I think of opportunities for women."...

In January of last year we published an article called "Playing Monopoly at *The Washington Post*" by Timothy Noah. It contended that the *Post*'s news coverage, among other things, had been hurt by the paper's monopoly status. Benjamin C. Bradlee, the *Post*'s editor, had this to say about the article: "I've got to tell you that that piece by Timothy Noah makes less sense than anything I've read in your distinguished magazine in years." Last month, in an article explaining why the *Post* had been beaten on a recent news story, Sam Zagoria, the *Post*'s omsbudsman, wrote:

"Mr. Bradlee attributes the setback to the lack of local competition. He recalls the days when he covered courts for the *Post* and there was all-out rivalry with reporters from the *Times Herald*, *Evening Star*, and *Daily News*."...

There is a certain disingenuousness in the Pentagon's current attacks on high spending defense contractors. The military itself encourages these extravagant and wasteful practices. Often the colonels and commanders are on the phone practically begging contractors to take on work almost without regard to price. Indeed, there are often hints that the price should be as high as possible. The reason is that, somewhere around the middle of the fiscal year, the services begin to grow desperate about their ability to actually spend all that money they persuaded Congress to appropriate. When some conscientious fellow tries to save money he'll almost be certain to get the back of a brass hand. This year, for example, the Navy figured out that it spent only $26.7 billion of $29.2 billion allotted for ship construction in the past two years. Civilian officials at the Navy Department thought this was something to brag about. But the brass said keep it quiet. Congress might say we don't need as much money next year if we show that we failed to spend all that they gave us last year and the year before....

I want to congratulate Robert Pear of *The New York Times* for an important story he did in January. It was an unusual effort for a Washington reporter because it was not restricted to what could be found on one of the traditional government beats, like State, Congress, the Pentagon, or the White House. What Pear did was to step back and look at the personnel situation at the upper levels of the entire government in a sampling that cut across the board. "There are," he found, "at least 20 vacancies in positions at the level of assistant secretary or higher in the Departments of Health and Human Services, Labor, Housing and Urban Development, Education, and Justice." To anyone who understands the workings of this government and the importance of the assistant secretary level as the action point between the top political officials and the permanent civil servants, this was disturbing news. Its significance was correctly analyzed by Michael S. Horowitz, the counsel to the director of OMB, who told Pear:

"Personnel is policy. If you are not filling key policy

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positions, it's business as usual, and the interest groups are happy. They prefer to have drift and irresolution because then decisions are made by 'iron triangles' of low-level officials, congressional staff, and lobbyists."

If you need a convincing example of Ronald Reagan's indifference to the work of government as distinguished from speeches and policy pronouncements, this is it....

Going to college will cost about 7 or 8 percent more next fall according to *The Wall Street Journal*. Since inflation is running at about half that rate, why the increase? The central reason, as Timothy Noah pointed out in "Highbrow Robbery" (July/August 1983), is that for years now college professors have been earning more for teaching less. Fat and sloppy administration is another factor, as is tenure for incompetent professors whose classrooms are filled with empty seats, which of course translate into no revenue for their schools....

The CIA has proposed a bill to punish disclosure of classified information. This will probably be perceived by the left as a threat to freedom of the press, as indeed it is probably intended to be by the administration. But have no fear as long as one section remains in the bill. It says that those accused can escape conviction if the documents were not "properly classified."

The fact is that there are few govenment documents that are not overclassified. When I worked in the Kennedy-Johnson administration, we routinely classified material as "Confidential" simply because it might embarrass some bureaucrat.

I am indebted to Richard Halloran of *The New York Times* for an example of the absurd heights the classifiers reach every day. It is a paragraph taken from a memorandum setting out the objectives for the Navy's 1968 budget. It reads:

"The Navy must continue to attract and retain sufficient numbers of high-quality, skilled, and motivated people. Compensation and quality of life improvements must be competitive in the job market. Ways must be found to reduce requirements for administrative functions, reduce personal turbulence, and permanent change of station moves."

The paragraph was classified "Secret."...

I love *USA Today* for its sports coverage—is there any other paper where you're sure to get the box scores of all the major league teams? But its editors should hang their heads in shame over a recent headline, "Social Security Tax Rocks Elderly." The lead sentence of the article is equally alarming: "The news this tax season for elderly taxpayers is mainly bad."

What were the facts that inspired *USA Today* to panic its older readers? Simply that the comfortable elderly will now pay taxes on their Social Security income. But a single person will not have to pay until his total income reaches $25,000, and a couple will not have to pay until theirs is $32,000. Even then not more than half the benefits will be subject to tax. In other words, this tax does not hurt the average senior citizen. But they must have been reaching for their heart pills when they read the *USA Today* story.

The tragedy of this kind of journalism is that it drives frightened old people to write their congressmen, who in turn will be afraid to do anything more toward instituting a means test for Social Security, which is the only long-range reform that makes sense.

If we don't control the costs of Social Security, we will continue to see the escalation of the Social Security tax. I pointed out last month how that tax hurts struggling businesses. I am indebted to Marion Wright Edelman of the Children's Defense Fund for reminding me how much it hurts the working poor. In 1979, a woman who supported three children on a poverty-level wage paid $288 in Social Security and federal income taxes. In 1984, the same working mother paid $1,210 in combined taxes....

If we institute, as I of course hope we do, a program of national service,

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we might profit from the experience of the West Germans. They found such a suspiciously high proportion of their young choosing civilian forms of service over military that they have now altered the period of service so that it is 15 months for the military and 20 months for Peace Corps/VISTA-type service....

Where are yesterday's revolutionaries? Bernardine Dohrn, former leader of the Weather Underground, is now a lawyer and has joined a prominent Chicago firm, Sidley & Austin. Does this reflect a commitment by Sidley & Austin to equal opportunity for former revolutionaries? Perhaps not. It seems that Dohrn's father-in-law is the chairman of Sidley's largest client, Commonwealth Edison. "We're not going to hold her past against her," the firm's managing partner told *The American Lawyer*....

Speaking of our friends the lawyers, a suit has been filed on behalf of 29 American law firms to prevent the Indian government from representing its citizens in their claims against Union Carbide. Why are they concerned? You might get a hint from the fact that those same law firms have filed $100 billion in claims against Carbide on behalf of more than 148,000 victims they managed to sign up through the kind of practices I described in this space recently. At the usual fee of one-third, these lawyers see visions of $33 billion in their dreams. How can the Indian government dare to disturb this delicious prospect?

But, as they say, don't get me wrong—not all lawyers are bad. Take David Murphy, a Chicago lawyer who five years ago came to the rescue of an elderly woman named Annice Saucier when she was cheated by another lawyer. Murphy charged her only $100 for that service. Her gratitude was such that she left him her entire estate, worth about $140,000. Murphy turned down the bequest so that it could go to her nieces and nephews....

John Young was executed in Georgia's electric chair on March 20. His last words were, "Being born black in America was against me." He was probably right. He also endured a frightening childhood. At the age of three, he witnessed his mother's murder and then was sent to live with an alcoholic who threw him out into the streets.

Mr. Young had excuses—plenty of them—for what he later did wrong. But that wrong—killing three elderly people while robbing their homes—was one that society, if it does not have to punish, certainly has to prevent from being repeated. This means that, even though we understand why Mr. Young and other victims of society commit crimes and, in that sense, forgive them for their sins, we still have to keep them from killing again.

For me, this does not mean the death penalty is needed.

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It does mean, however, that violent criminals should be put away for a long time—until they are no longer a danger to society.

Wait a minute, you say. What about our overcrowded jails? There is a simple answer. Room can be made to keep the violent in prison as long as is necessary simply by giving many of the nonviolent, who are a majority of all prisoners today, alternative sentences that don't involve incarceration but do require that they spend nights and weekends working for the community and making restitution to their victims.....

Another absurdity of our security procedures is the foreign nationals who work in our embassies. Remember when the CIA was crying treason at the radical magazines that published the names of CIA station chiefs? *The Washington Monthly* pointed out at that time that each embassy had scores of host national employees who knew perfectly well who the top CIA people were in their country.

How did the custom of hiring these people begin? As best I can determine, it originated in the need for translators—Americans, remember, are notoriously incapable or scornful of learning foreign languages—and the need for servants, which was justified on the basis of "this is the customary way of life for the people with whom we associate here."

You may have read the recent revelations that our embassy in Moscow was bugged from 1982 to 1984. If you can't guess who planted the devices, *The Washington Times*, which was more enterprising on this story than most papers, reported:

"There are between 100 and 130 Soviets working at the U.S. embassy at any given time. They handle routine maintenance, electrical and plumbing repairs, do the building cleaning, and, until recently, answered the telephones.

"Soviet personnel also are used as auto mechanics and drivers for U.S. diplomats. They run the food service operations and man the kiosk in the embassy where liquor is sold."

I suspect the main bureaucratic motivation behind the growth of foreign staff in our embassies is evasion of personnel ceilings. Every government agency that serves abroad is from time to time working under limits—imposed by Congress, the OMB, or the agency's own administration—as to the number of personnel "slots" available at each post. Generally, foreign hires have not been counted under these ceilings. So if you're a mission chief and want to get an employee on board without a lot of bother—especially when you don't want to admit you're hiring another employee whose main function is to make life more comfortable for the American diplomats—the simple solution has usually been to hire a citizen of the local country. These employees are given security clearances by the local embassy staff, but the plain fact is that they are citizens not of our country but of their own country, to which their primary loyalty belongs. In some embassies, it doesn't make any difference whether the employees are loyal to us—indeed, some embassies are so unimportant the question is not who should staff them but whether we need the embassies at all—but it does seem insane to have foreign personnel inside sensitive posts, especially in countries where the government is hostile to our own....

Thought I'd forgotten about tax-deductible vacations? Not a chance. You may be too late for this one, but R. Max Bowser of "The Bowser Report" advertises, "Enjoy a tax-deductible trip to scenic Zurich, Switzerland, May 9-16...where I'm conducting a workshop on 'How to Detect the Best Stocks at $3 and Under.' "

I'm sorry to report that you've already missed the April 19-25 conference in San Juan, Costa Rica, sponsored by the American Association of Financial Professionals. The ad for it was headlined "Vacation in Costa Rica Where You'll Learn How to Write Off a Lot More than Just Your Vacation."

The magazine *Dentist* reports that the American Dental Association will hold continuing education programs this year in San Juan, Puerto Rico, the French Riviera, Belgrade, Montreal, and Honolulu. Featured on the accompanying tours are such places as

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Paris, Lucerne, Berne, Montreux, Florence, Rome, the Rhine River, Athens, and the Greek islands.

As for the medical doctors, Ray Potter of the Knight-Ridder papers estimates that we are paying for the "continuing education" in courses that often are "taught in exotic vacation spots as on ocean cruises" of approximately 130,000 physicians a year. Now if you remember that they charge us enough in fees to earn an average of $100,000 a year, it does seem a bit much to be paying for their vacations as well....

In recent years we have seen public television exalt the lives of the British upper class and the commercial networks glamorize our own rich in shows like "Dallas," "Dynasty," and "Falcon Crest." What a social change this represents from the days when we identified with Lucy and the Honeymooners and other average people. Was Archie Bunker the last guy next door to make it in the ratings?

Recently in the course of writing a book that deals in part with my early years, I've been thinking a lot about life in the thirties, when I was a child. Then, too, we liked to watch movies about the rich. But the motive was more escape than emulation. The producer of one of today's shows, "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous," told *The New York Times*, "I think people are using our programs to see what the rich are buying and order it themselves." I think there's more to it than that—a total tendency to identify upward.

This was most definitely not the case in the thirties. My father, even though he had made it into the middle class as a lawyer, still identified with his poor relatives on the farm. At the dinner table he would curse a rise in interest rates. Even though the rise might benefit him and would certainly help the rich, it would hurt the struggling farmer—and my father identified with the farmer, not J.R....

A glimpse into the lifestyle of the Reagan administration's national security elite was recently provided by *The New York Times*, which asked Richard N. Perle, the assistant secretary of defense for international security policy, and Richard R. Burt, assistant secretary of state for European affairs, about their preferences in, among other things, wine and cars. Perle chose Romancee-Conti and the Fiat Spyder; Burt, Pouilly-Fuisse and the BMW and the Morgan Plus 4....

Here's why I think George Bush, absent some terrible mistake on his part, will be the Republican nominee in 1988. Every one of his colleagues in the Reagan administration and every state and local Republican official has to contemplate each day the possible death of Ronald Reagan and Bush's immediate ascendancy to the presidency. This possibility is enough, as they say it in the trade, to "keep them in line." They are not about to offend Bush by supporting some other candidate for the nomination....

Now for that counterattack on conservatives that I proposed last month. Consider three areas where they have been dead wrong for years and remain dead wrong today. I'm talking about safety regulation, pollution control, and jobs. On safety, the Reaganites have failed to do even the simplest things like forbidding lethal luggage in those overhead compartments on planes. And what about those dangerous cribs for children? And the elimination of the five-mile-per-hour bumper on cars? You have to be a real fool or a stockholder to think that industry voluntarily takes care of safety. The same is true of pollution control. We'll all drown in toxic waste before the conservatives do anything about it.

On jobs, the conservatives want us to accept 7 percent unemployment as normal. What it really is is a scandal. And of course 7 percent is merely the official rate. The real rate is, as everyone knows, two or three times as high for blacks and Hispanics. And for a lot of other people as well. The *Charleston-Gazette* recently ran a front-page article estimating that the real rate of unemployment in West Virginia is 28.1 percent.

We liberals may fall into error from time to time, but on these issues we've been consistently right and the conservatives have been consistently wrong. We should be proud of the difference....

—*Charles Peters*

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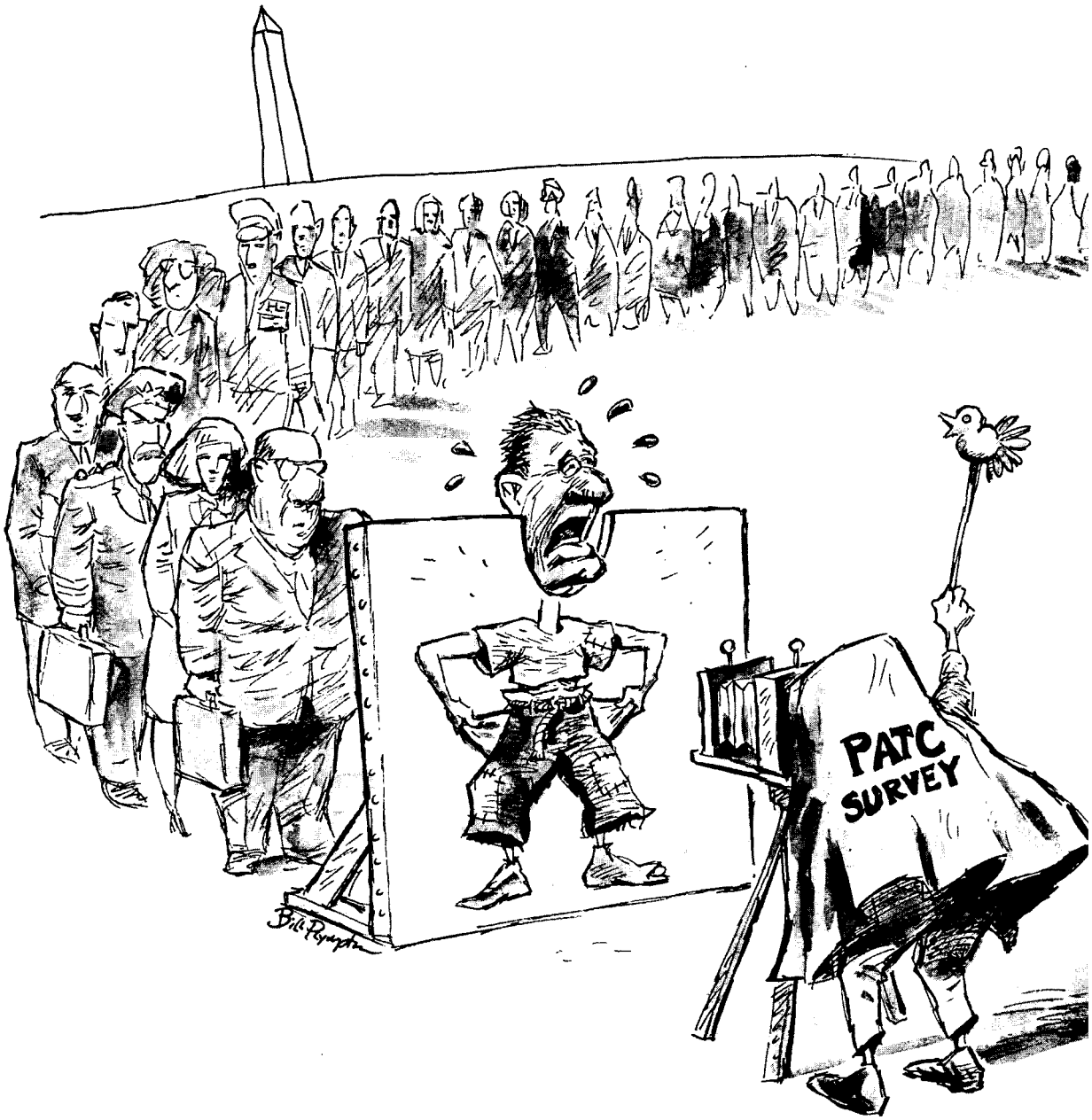
How to End the



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Federal Pension Scandal

By Timothy Noah

Testifying before a congressional committee this past February, David Stockman blew his famous cool over the generosity of military pensions. "It's a scandal! It's an outrage!" exclaimed the budget director, sounding like Jimmy Stewart in "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington." Stockman caused a minor furor in defense circles by accusing the military of caring more about its pensions than about national security.

Things quieted down a few days later when Ronald Reagan told *The Wall Street Journal* that he felt soldiers deserved the special treatment they received upon retirement. But Stockman is not alone in his concern about military pensions; many others have criticized the system, including the new chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, Les Aspin. And the problem is not confined to the military. While military pensions gobble up more than $18 billion a year, civil service pensions cost an even higher $22 billion. Outlays for civil service pensions have in recent years exceeded the combined cost of the two most important poverty programs, Aid to Families with Dependent Children and Food Stamps. To put this comparison in perspective, there are only about two million civil service retirees, compared to more than 20 million participants in these welfare programs.

There are two reasons why such statistics should worry us. The most obvious is money. With the federal deficit exceeding $200 billion, Congress must figure out a way to cut spending without harming the most vulnerable recipients of federal funds—welfare recipients, for example. A substantial portion of the federal budget now goes to paying past and present employees. Add up military and civilian pensions, throw in the cost of present salaries, and an extremely conservative estimate of the annual labor cost of running the federal government comes to about $170 billion. Even excluding salaries and pensions for the judicial branch, congressional staff members, and members of the intelligence agencies, compensation amounts to at least 20 percent of the federal budget.

And that's just this year. Long-range estimates of what the federal government is presently committed to paying out in pension benefits add up to $528 billion for the civil service and $709 billion for the military. About 1,500 federal retirees are expected to collect more than $1 million each in pensions, either during their retirement or, after death, through surviving dependents.

But saving money isn't the only reason to care about these costs. Paradoxically, the federal government's generosity leads to the premature loss of talent. Because of a deliberate policy of encouraging workers to retire at an early age, civilian employees typically leave the federal government, pensions in hand, at age 55. Military

Timothy Noah is a contributing editor of The Washington Monthly.

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Under John F. Kennedy, the morale of federal workers was high, but it has hit bottom under Reagan. One result is self-pity and a greater concern about salaries and pensions.

employees, eligible for full pensions after 20 years of service, typically retire even earlier, at age 40—and frequently as early as 38. This is the time in life when workers in the private sector ascend to their highest positions of responsibility. In government, it is when experienced employees head for the door.

To understand why we let this happen, we need to consider the arguments federal workers and the military use in defense of their pension benefits. More important, we need to grasp how changing attitudes toward government work, both within and without the federal workforce, have shaped the way we pay federal employees. The problem is less a matter of avarice than of morale.

Deadwood reconsidered

Federal workers usually will concede that their pension benefits are more generous than those received by most employees in the private sector. Most private pension plans, for example, do not provide the full cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) that public employee pensions do. Employees on most private pension plans retire not at age 40 or 55 but have to wait until they're 63. And private pension plans insist that the employee make a contribution toward his retirement fund through payroll deductions. Military retirees, by contrast, make no such contribution, while that of civil service employees is shrinking. According to the Grace Commission, the civil service employee contribution fell from 36 percent of the total pensions paid in 1970 to 13 percent in 1982; the federal government has been taking up the slack.

A handful of advocates have sought to paint a less rosy picture of federal pensions. For example, a congressional task force chaired by Reps. Mike Barnes and Vic Fazio argues strenuously, in a booklet entitled "Ten Myths about Civil Service," that federal pensions are not the most generous in the country, as some critics allege. But no one can deny that federal pensions are *among* the most generous; even most Fortune 500 companies fail to provide so well for retirees.

Rather than quibble about the generosity of federal pensions, defenders of the status quo more often make these four arguments:

● *Federal pensions compensate for low pay.* By law, the Bureau of Labor Statistics each year conducts a survey to find out how pay in the federal government compares to that in the private sector. Federal workers and military personnel are then supposed to get raises based on the BLS calculations. But in recent years, federal workers have not received the full amount of this "comparability" increase. The result: federal workers have, according to BLS, fallen 18 percent behind their counterparts outside the government.

● *Military pensions compensate for hardship.* Here is how Ronald Reagan argued this point in his interview with *The Wall Street Journal*: "I have to think [the military pension program] is a little different than any other pension program you want to name. They go into a profession in which they know that, in a matter of a certain number of years, the physical requirements are such that they're going to be out. There is that—coupled with the sacrifice that is made by the military. I talked to a retired military officer. He had found other employment. But he told me that in the call of duty, for 20 of his 31 married years, he and his wife had not been together. He was out in the world someplace."

● *Retirement is the best way to get rid of the deadwood.* In many cases, especially in the military, once youth is gone, so is your usefulness. Early retirement is a good way to prevent too

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many people from hanging on—or getting kicked upstairs. The ratio of bosses to workers in both the military and the civil service is already distressingly high; to cite just one example, Edward Luttwak, author of *The Pentagon and the Art of War*, estimates that there are "maybe ten times more lieutenant colonels than battalions." Early retirement offers a way to trim fat in the middle and upper ranks.

● *A generous pension plan is a good recruitment incentive.* Quality employees will be lured into federal service by the superior guarantee of security that it provides in its retirement plan.

Let's deal first with the argument about hardship. Reagan says that because military life is uniquely rigorous, soldiers shouldn't have to wait so long to get out of the service and shouldn't have to kick in a contribution toward their retirement. This reflects the common view of military life that one encounters at the Pentagon, which a skeptical investigator for the General Accounting Office characterized to me as "a soldier is a soldier is a soldier." The trouble with this view is that it overlooks vast distinctions between different parts of the military. Serving in the Navy, for example, can involve more sacrifice than the Air Force if you're sent out to sea for long periods of time. Overall, it's important to remember that the majority of military jobs are desk jobs. According to the GAO, as of 1975, *93 percent* of enlisted personnel were working in non-combat jobs, and *31 percent had never worked in combat-related positions.* It's hard to see why these non-combat personnel should be treated any better than civilian employees when it comes to retirement.

Now let's consider the deadwood argument. This line of reasoning makes a certain amount of sense when you consider how difficult it is to fire a federal worker. But if we want to get rid of an incompetent federal employee, and find that the machinery of the appeals process makes this forbiddingly difficult—as it often does—then the answer is to streamline the process so that incompetents can be fired. Similarly, if the middle ranks of the bureaucracy are bloated—and they are—a more direct solution than providing a golden handshake is to promote fewer people. Bribery shouldn't be the only tool at our disposal to make the bureaucracy lean and efficient.

Next, let's examine the recruitment argument. There are two points to make here. The first is that not many people begin their working lives wondering about their pensions. This is especially true in the military, where enough of the rough-

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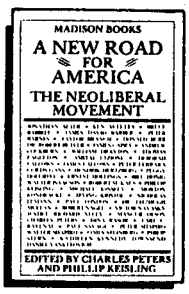
A New Road for America: The Neoliberal Movement

edited by Charles Peters and Phillip Keisling



Developed from a 1983 conference sponsored by *The Washington Monthly,* this new work offers a broad-based manifesto for the neoliberal movement, including contributions from Bruce Babbitt, James David Barber, James Fallows, Michael Kinsley, Victor Navasky, Irving Kristol, Andrew Cockburn, Ken Auletta, Daniel Yankelovich, Hendrik Hertzberg, Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, and others. Charles Peters, the "godfather" of the neoliberal movement is editor of *The Washington Monthly.* Phillip Keisling is a former editor of *The Washington Monthly.*

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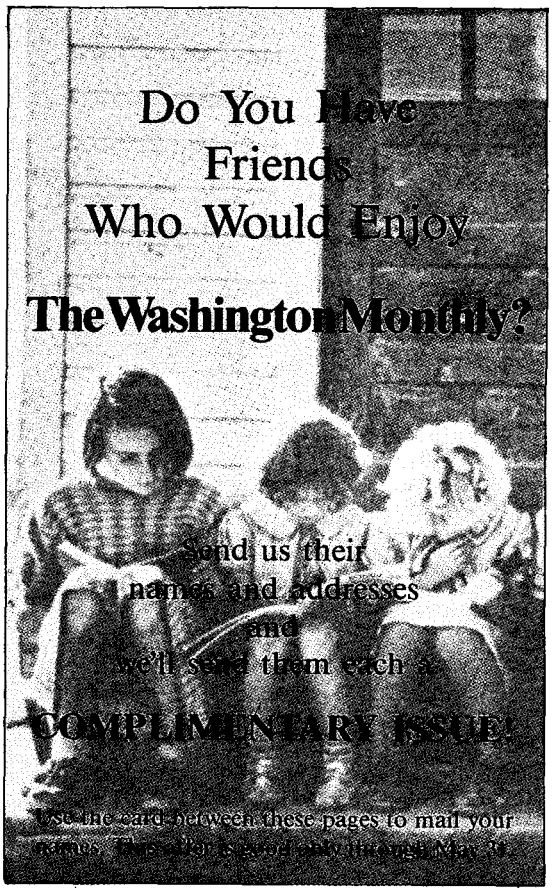
and-ready ethic remains to render such considerations especially remote. Even in peacetime, the military is not the place where one would expect to find people whose highest priority in life is security. As for those who do seek to join the federal bureaucracy because they find the pensions enticing, are these likely to be the best people? Not to put too fine a point on it, what kind of wimp spends his twenties and thirties fretting about pension benefits?

Who you callin' patsy?

The most formidable argument on behalf of generous pensions is that they make up for the government's inability to pay salaries comparable to the private sector. When the civil service retirement program was launched in 1920, part of the idea behind it was that it would compensate for what were widely recognized as low salaries. And when COLAs were incorporated into pensions in 1963, the idea, once again, was to make up for low pay.



A nagging suspicion that federal pay was trailing behind the private sector persisted, and in 1970 Congress established an elaborate procedure to remedy the problem. The Bureau of Labor Statistics was instructed to conduct an annual survey of professional, administrative, technical, and clerical jobs in the public and private sectors. The PATC (pronounced "patsy") survey is presented to the President's Pay Agent, a body whose members include Donald Devine, director of the Office of Personnel Management, Stockman, and the secretary of labor. Following predetermined guidelines established by law, the President's Pay Agent translates the PATC survey results into a recommended "comparability" raise that will theoretically bring federal wages in line with the private sector. But the president is not formally bound to grant that raise, and in every year since 1977, the Pay Agent has rejected the PATC survey recommendations in favor of more modest increases, typically 5 percent.

Watching this process year after year, federal workers have come to feel like, well, patsies. One arm of the government tells them they are underpaid; then another arm tells them they may not have the raise they seem to deserve. But Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan rejected the findings of their PATC surveys with good reason: the process provides a distorted comparison of pay scales. For one thing, the PATC survey focuses almost exclusively on companies that employ a minimum of 250 workers. This immediately cuts out of the sample the 70 percent of the workforce employed by small businesses. The portion that remains within the PATC survey represents a minority who work for big companies that can pay their employees a higher wage than smaller (and, most likely, more efficient) companies can. In other words, the PATC survey covers only an elite slice of the American workforce.

Furthermore, the PATC survey falls victim to the tendency of federal workers to inflate their job descriptions so that they can attain a high general schedule (GS) grade. Grade creep infects the entire civil service; since 1949, the average GS grade has risen from 5 to 8 (on a scale of 1 to 18), and more than 70 percent of white collar personnel are graded at or above GS-11. Some would argue that this reflects the government's greater need for highly skilled management. However, as Leonard Reed, a former civil servant and a contributing editor to this magazine, has noted in these pages, the responsibilities of most GS-15s are less than those of a Safeway manager.

How does grade inflation occur? It helps to

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remember that the people who assign the grades are themselves civil servants, and thus have little reason to want to tighten up the procedure. Indeed, federal workers frequently provide their own job descriptions. Here is how one former employee of the Agriculture Department describes the way the game is played: "By bullying and wheedling and whining, I was allowed to write my own [job description]. You would think it was a redo of that of the Parliamentarian of the House and Senate with the attributes of the Librarian of Congress thrown in, plus a touch of Clark Clifford and Thomas B. Corcoran for good measure. . . . I didn't think anyone would accept what I turned in, but it was." As Leonard Reed put it, "Anybody who has ever worked in a government agency knows that job descriptions will endow a file clerk with responsibilities before which a graduate of the Harvard Business School quails."

During the late seventies, the Civil Service Commission (predecessor to the Office of Personnel Management) conducted random audits of the federal agencies and found 11 percent of the jobs overgraded. Today, on the basis of more recent studies, OPM estimates that the figure is more like 14 percent for federal workers located throughout the country and that in the Washington area *30 percent* of all federal jobs are overgraded. In 1982, OPM sought to clarify the question of pay comparability, which the PATC survey had confused for years. Matching census data for occupations in the federal government to corresponding occupations in the private sector, OPM concluded that PATC had it exactly backwards; rather than lagging behind their private-sector counterparts, federal workers earned, on average, 11 percent more. And that's without figuring in the value of pension benefits.

Federal workers might argue that such calculations reflect the bias of an anti-government administration looking for a rationale to cut federal pay. But intuition and other evidence support OPM. Just take a look around Washington. Does this look like a city in which the local industry underpays its workers? In fact, Washington's standard of living ranks among the highest in the country. The average salary for federal workers in Washington, as reported last December by Mike Causey, civil service columnist for *The Washington Post*, is $30,784. The median federal salary is $27,252. Both these figures are more than double the comparable figures for the population at large. And Causey's statistics do *not* include pay raises granted to federal workers this

THE WASHINGTON MONTHLY

Journalism Award

for February 1985 is presented to

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The New York Times Magazine

In a two-part series, Auletta brings the abstractions of high finance down to earth by showing how human factors—executive ego, class resentment, and outright greed—played into the sale of Lehman Brothers, until last year the nation's oldest financial partnership. Auletta demonstrates that major upheavals in the financial service industry have less to do with rational economic behavior than the power-seeking and the like of the principals involved.

and

Paul Burka
The Texas Monthly

Burka's comprehensive program for cutting $1 billion from the hard-pressed Texas state budget leaves no sacred cow or porkbarrel untouched. A few examples: Close down the $8 million Texas Commission on the Arts, which indulges the egos of influential patrons rather than saving prospective Picasso s from starvation. Issue one license plate—not two—per motor vehicle and save $4.8 million. Trim the staff of Texas's lobbying office in Washington and save $1.5 million.

The Monthly Journalism Award is presented each month to the best newspaper, magazine, television, or radio story (or series of stories) on our political system. Nominations for any newspaper, magazine, or radio or television station in the country are welcome. The subject can be government in its federal, state, or municipal manifestation.

The award for stories published or aired in April will be announced in the July/August issue. Nominations will close May 15. Nominations should be accompanied by two copies of the story or stories.

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past January. It's hard to avoid the conclusion that the average federal worker is doing quite well in comparison to other Americans.

The self-pity trap

Unfortunately, federal workers don't feel that way. Recently, Causey invited his civil servant readers to write in with their reactions to the administration's latest proposals to cut federal pay by 5 percent (there will probably be a freeze instead) and trim back benefits. Here were some of the responses:

"My career is about over in the federal service. I have made no big advances in my career, or any big marks to be remembered. I just did my job. If I had it all to do over again, I would have second thoughts."

"We the willing, led by the unknowing, are doing the impossible for the ungrateful. We have done so much for so long with so little we are not qualified to do anything with nothing."

"Please, Mr. President...cut my retirement. Make all of us work longer. We can help the budget and fill the halls of government with people with walkers and put benches in so the elderly employees can keep working and not draw retirement."

At times, the pettiness and the self-pity of federal workers seem to know no bounds. Last February, I went to Capitol Hill to see Donald Devine present the administration's proposals for trimming federal compensation. When he took the stand, the members of the audience wearing red, white, and blue baseball caps bearing the initials of the American Federation of Government Employees hissed loudly. (Matronly rebuke from the chair, Rep. Mary Rose Oakar: "We know that these are issues that are very near and dear to you, but we want witnesses to be treated with eminent courtesy.") One federal worker noticed during a break that despite a no-smoking rule, Devine was puffing on a cigar. The worker complained bitterly to her comrades: "That just goes to show you the duality of the system. The law's just for the peons. *It hurts my sinuses!*"

Such bitterness is markedly different from the attitude held by federal workers just a quarter-century ago. With his admonition to "ask not what your country can do for you," but "what you can do for your country," John F. Kennedy bestowed upon the federal bureaucracy a sense of mission and purpose, and sometimes even glamour. The most prominent example was the Peace Corps. Bright young graduates of the best colleges flooded into the newly established agency; for many, it was the beginning of a lifelong commitment to public service. "When those [comparability] raises began," recalls a veteran of the Kennedy-era Peace Corps, "we felt as though we were stealing it because we were having so much fun." In contrast to the federal worker who tells Mike Causey that he has left no mark on the world, "We felt proud of what we were doing." The sense that civil servants were *public* servants, doing work that was important, was widespread among government workers.

The federal worker's self-esteem began to fall during the Vietnam war. Suddenly the machinery of government, which had seemed so well-oiled, was incapable of putting the brakes on policies that were failing abroad. Even those qualities that had increased the prestige of public service began to seem less than benign. For example, "effectiveness" became, to some, a dirty word. In 1968, James C. Thomson Jr., a refugee from the State Department's East Asia desk, described "the 'effectiveness' trap" in *The Atlantic*: "To preserve your effectiveness, you must decide where and when to fight the mainstream of policy; the opportunities range from pillow talk with your wife, to private drinks with your friends, to meetings with the secretary of state or the president. The inclination to remain silent or acquiesce in the presence of the great man—to live to fight another day, to give on this issue so that you can be 'effective' on later issues—is overwhelming." By the time David Halberstam's *The Best and The Brightest* was published in 1972, the glamour of government service to which Halberstam's title made ironic reference had dimmed considerably. The bright young Ivy Leaguers who had once gone into the Peace Corps were now coming to Washington to work for Ralph Nader as adversaries of government.

Except for a Burkean here and there, conservatives had never held much regard for the bureaucracy, so there was little opportunity for the civil service to recoup its dignity during the Nixon and Ford administrations. By the time Jimmy Carter came to Washington, Watergate had lowered the public's estimation of the government even further. Carter got elected by deliberately running against Washington, and when he arrived he spent a great deal of time trying to reform the civil service. Finally came Ronald Reagan, who embraced the far right's brittle hostility to the whole notion of government service. "In this present crisis," he declaimed in his first inaugural address, "government is not the

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The New Deal: When the Motive Wasn't Money

By Bert W. Strauss

People frequently accuse federal bureaucrats of accomplishing little or nothing, sometimes at great expense. There is another side, too, but instances of agencies doing their jobs well seldom make the news these days. Shining examples of outstanding administration are easy to overlook or forget.

In the New Deal days, 40-odd years ago, I had the good luck to be an official in an organization that worked. In the Rural Rehabilitation Program of the Farm Security Administration, we aimed at getting our clients off relief permanently and bringing neglected land back into productivity, a job that the program carried out with surprising success. I served as an associate chief fiscal officer, supervising activities in the northeast quarter of the country.

From its beginning in the mid-1930s until it ended in 1946, Rural Rehabilitation helped get some 893,000 families off relief and productively back on farms. By mid-1942, when farm prices were still in a very early stage of their World War II rise, those once-destitute farmers had repaid 83 percent of the amounts due on their loans, plus 5 percent interest. Ultimately, we received a 94.8 percent financial return.

How did Rural Rehabilitation do it? What might today's and tomorrow's public officials learn from our example? Two recollections stand out: first, the sense we bureaucrats had that we were partners, not adversaries, of the farmers we served; and second, the cooperation *among* bureaucrats, regardless of rank.

We worked in the days of John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*, when family after family, driven from little farms by the drought, dust storms, and rock-bottom prices, packed the few possessions they could into ancient trucks and headed west. The typical Rural Rehabilitation county office was above a store in a building on Main Street, across from the courthouse. It was small and plain, with a nondescript desk in one corner and a typist at work in another. In the center, sitting around a cheap table, government supervisors would help farm couples put broken lives back together.

Jointly, the farmers and the Rural Rehabilitation representatives itemized the crops borrowers would plant, the livestock they intended to raise, the equipment they needed, and the building improvements to be made. Next came the yields the clients could expect to obtain and the income each of their farm products should bring.

The borrowers brought their experience, interests, and abilities to the shared activity. The government supervisors contributed from their own farm backgrounds and their technical knowledge. As the planning went on, the supervisors described methods the borrowers had never heard of that would be useful on the farm they were about to rent. With the plan completed, the supervisors helped the farmer and his wife rent the farm. As months passed, they were frequently in touch, helping the clients apply the new skills. But that mutually prepared plan remained the basis of the farmer's program, and cooperative effort was the key to the plan's success.

The vision, faith, and determination of the people who ran the Farm Security Administration in Washington fueled the work in the field. The original inspiration was that of Rexford G. Tugwell, a former professor of economics at Columbia University who became undersecretary of agriculture. He demonstrated the need for constructive farm relief to Agriculture Secretary Henry A. Wallace, who sold that need to President Roosevelt and then to the Congress.

Headquarters functioned smoothly. Washington officials maintained much more active communication with the field than is typical in a federal organization. These officials sought ideas from their subordinates and acted on them. When they planned policy changes, they toured field offices to explain the adjustments to senators, congressmen, and local

Bert W. Strauss is the coauthor of three books, including How to Get Things Changed.

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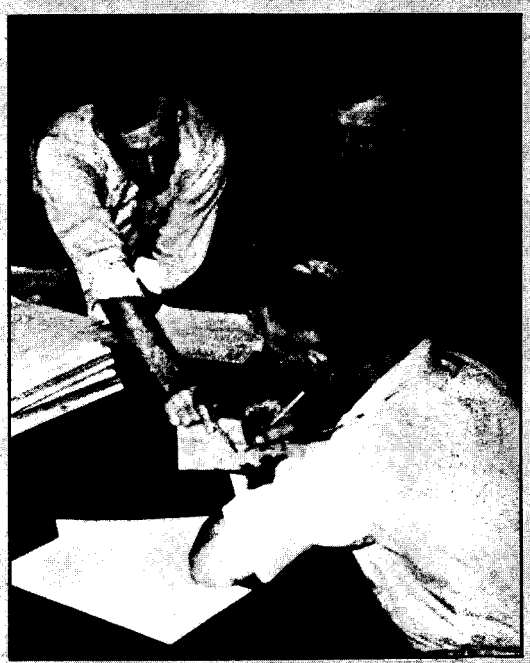
officeholders. Regional officials were free to deviate from standard procedure to meet special problems. Strong leadership was rewarded at every turn. In making personnel decisions, Washington officials asked, "Who is the man who gets things done?" C. Benham (Beany) Baldwin, an assistant administrator, explained at the time, "We don't let people get into ruts. Every year we change operations enough so they can't get set in their ways."

After Rexford Tugwell resigned in 1937, the people he had brought into top-level jobs in the administration led the FSA to its greatest successes. Nelson Cruikshank, an early staff member who became director of the Migratory Farm Labor Program, recently put his thinking in a nutshell for me: "The personnel had a deep commitment to the social purposes of the program, a sense of doing something for people, and we were able to relate our routine work to that overall purpose. None of us thought we were entering into a permanent career. FSA was just giving us a chance to do what we would have liked to be doing even in the absence of a government program."

Lawrence Hewes Jr., from the beginning a member of the Washington staff and later a regional director, explained that the Rural Rehabilitation Program worked because "we were terrifically insecure. Each year was a terrific battle to secure appropriations for the next. None of us had tenure, none of us could expect more than to survive the current fiscal year. There was about us a touch of that famous Roman salute, 'Hail Caesar, we who are about to die salute you!' Politically we had no status. Yet we were politically innovative. Each year our supporters were a sort of heterogeneous 'Gideon's Army'—Senator La Follette, liberal Roman Catholics, Quakers, the Farmers Union, and damn few of the Agricultural Establishment—and we could raise hell with our guerrilla-like political strategy. . . . We were able! My God, were we *able*!"



Hewes also stressed organizational factors, which had much to do with motivation and success: "Not being under civil service meant we could hire and fire at will. We were very tough about this. . . . Another thing we simply would not stand was efforts of employees to use congressional influence. We fired several who tried to use congressional support for promotion."

Mary Barr, whose husband Mason Barr was an FSA administrator, cast an additional light on the intensity of top staff feelings: "One night when Congress was debating the passage of a bill far into the night, a bill FSA deemed necessary for the victims of poverty and dust storms, Mase came home at 1 a.m., sat on the edge of the bed, and sobbed. Passage had failed, and the defeat was agonizing. I wonder how many bureaucrats care that much now."

That intense feeling dominated the work of top level staff, but there was relaxation, too. Sundays saw key department and FSA staff members pitching horseshoes or throwing boomerangs with Secretary Wallace in Rock Creek Park. Train trips to the field provided the perfect opportunity for staff poker games. The players made bets loudly with, "I'll raise you five dollars." But five dollars meant five cents.

The 1980s differ considerably from the 1930s. The challenges are new, often more complex than ours were. But the spirit we felt in the face of national disaster could have as powerful an effect today as it did then. Through all the years, it's still essential that management inspire subordinates to work together smoothly and creatively. The Rural Rehabilitation experience, with its clues for private industry, as well as public administration, has too many valuable possibilities to remain overlooked. ■

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solution: it is the problem." It was a far cry from "ask what you can do for your country."

During this time, government workers unionized in unprecedented numbers. The membership of the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) rose from 71,000 in 1960 to more than 260,000 by the end of 1977; that is, it nearly quadrupled. Inevitably, the message the union preached to its members had less to do with Cincinnatus-like sacrifice than it did with asserting employee rights. Meanwhile, the establishment of annual comparability raises, combined with routine "step" or seniority increases and a brisk rate of promotion, conditioned workers to expect as many as three raises a year. In fiscal 1984, for example, nearly half of the full-time, permanent federal employees in the GS or equivalent schedules received a step increase, and almost a quarter got a promotion. Even in the likely event of a "freeze" on federal pay this year—that is, a freeze on comparability raises—the step increases and promotions will continue.

The final factor that has changed the attitudes of federal workers has been the explosion of trade associations, consulting businesses, and law firms in Washington. Compared to the stupendous fees this new professional class commands, the pay of federal workers does indeed seem modest. Twenty years ago, a middle-level federal bureaucrat could afford to go to all but a handful of restaurants in Washington without too much worry. Today, however, the city is overrun with restaurants like Le Pavillon and The Palm, where the customers are almost never federal workers. The proliferation of conspicuously high-paid professionals has created a deep sense of envy in the federal bureaucracy, not to mention a distorted view of what the private sector is like. Washington has almost no industry, and hence few blue-collar employees, to round out the Washington bureaucrat's picture of the American workforce. The result is a view of the nation like Saul Steinberg's famous *New Yorker* map, with a Washington twist: beyond the Potomac lies a scattering of wealthy suburbs, not a smokestack or unemployment line among them.

Remember, however, that while the federal bureaucrat's self-image is shaped largely by Washington—the capital is where the union leadership resides, along with the greatest concentration of federal workers—Washington is not the only place where federal workers live. They are all over America. Sixteen states each have more than 80,000 federal workers or retirees. When the Reagan administration proposed its 5 percent pay cut this year, Reps. Mike Barnes and Vic Fazio ran it through a computer to calculate what it would cost congressional districts around the nation. They found that California would lose $431 million in wages; Florida, $125 million; Georgia, $113 million; Massachusetts, $70 million; New Jersey, $94 million; Ohio, $167 million; Pennsylvania, $172 million; and West Virginia, $19 million.

The result of this dispersal should be obvious to anyone familiar with the political process. Constituencies are created across the country that translate anxieties into demands that are then passed along to elected representatives in Congress. Congressmen, in turn, have a natural empathy for their federal worker constituents because they, too, receive generous federal pensions; John Chancellor recently reported on the "NBC Nightly News" that the average congressional pension comes to $34,000 a year. Carl Albert, former Speaker of the House, annually receives a staggering $87,000, while former Senator Harrison Williams, now serving time on an ABSCAM conviction in Allenwood Federal Prison, gets $42,000. In the end, the reality that federal employees are well compensated doesn't seem to matter much; what matters is that they are unhappy and are able to effectively communicate that unhappiness to Congress.

Irresponsibility insurance

How can the system be reformed? First, we must link pay to retirement benefits before deciding whether military and civil service compensation is "comparable" to that of the private sector. Then we should reform the way we perform the comparability survey.

One intriguing suggestion that OPM has put forward is to use what it calls the quit rate as a guideline in determining pay. The quit rate is precisely what it sounds like—the rate at which employees quit their jobs (or are fired). In the federal government, the "quit rate" is demonstrably lower than that of the private sector. In 1981, for example, the quit rate among manufacturers of durable goods was 13.2 percent; in the non-manufacturing sector, 18 percent; and in the federal government, 4.6 percent. Even when we count a shift from one federal job to another as a "quit," the federal quit rate hasn't risen in recent years much above 6 percent, while in the private sector quit rates have never fallen below 10 percent.

If OPM can demonstrate that a federal worker

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is less inclined to quit his job than his counterpart at IBM, surely that suggests the federal worker feels better "compensated," either in terms of pay, pension benefits, or in the more intangible sense of security federal workers enjoy (to a great extent because they're so difficult to fire). Shouldn't that be factored into the equation? By lowering pay in some job categories where turnover is noticeably more sluggish than it is outside government, we could begin to acknowledge federal workers' own seat-of-the-pants measurement of "comparability"—that is, the comparable benefit of staying put as opposed to moving into the private sector.

Quit rates could be an effective tool for keeping too much fat from collecting in the middle ranks—indeed, a much better tool for this purpose than pensions. There are currently about 370,000 general schedule employees in grades 12 through 15 earning between $32,000 and $68,000, as opposed to about 85,000 in the bottom three grades, where salaries range from $9,000 to $15,000. Quit rates could be used to thin out the bosses (by paying them less) and to bring in more workers (by paying them more). To be sure, there are limits to this strategy; for those jobs that require heavy training, the desirability of maintaining brisk turnover must be weighed against the cost of getting each new employee up to speed. It would also be important not to encourage so much turnover that government offices suffered a substantial loss of institutional memory; some employees should remain for the long term to provide continuity.

Assuming that OPM's quit rate proposal would not set off excessive departures from government service, the only significant flaw in the plan is that OPM initially would survey only three broad categories of federal employment. Quit rates vary widely from job to job—think of the turnover among busboys as compared to maitre d's. To have meaning, a federal quit-rate survey would have to be calculated for each job category. The federal government already uses quit rates in this way to determine premiums to be paid *above* general schedule rates for jobs such as engineer and doctor, where employees tend to be lured away from the government and into the private sector.

Quit rate calculations could inject some badly needed flexibility into federal employee compensation. Another way to make the system more flexible would be to broaden the use of pay as recognition of merit. Instead of granting virtually automatic step increases, the government should tie these raises to evaluations of actual performance. Carter-era reform did introduce a merit-pay program, which has expanded under Reagan, but it applies exclusively to managers at the GS levels 13, 14, and 15—less than 10 percent of the civil service workforce. The principle should be extended to every level of the bureaucracy.

The Pentagon could achieve a similar flexibility in the military by broadening its bonus system, through which extra pay is awarded to personnel in areas requiring special skills or the endurance of unusual hardship. Bonus pay serves both to recognize the difficulty of certain jobs and to keep some specialists—most notably, pilots—from being lured away by prevailing wage levels in the private sector. Currently, the Pentagon can spend only about 5 percent of the military personnel budget on bonuses; the rest is rigidly dictated by salary schedules. What's more, many of the military's existing bonuses are poorly targeted. Take the Air Force's aviation career incentive pay. In theory, it is a good idea; skilled pilots are badly needed, and the Air Force must compete with the airline industry for the best of them. But in practice, shortages occur only in certain specialties. Helicopter pilots, for example, tend to stay in the service longer than jet pilots, who frequently jump to lucrative commercial jobs. The services have not always recognized this in awarding aviation career incentive pay. A 1982 GAO report complained that bonuses averaging more than $18,000 and as high as $39,000 were being awarded to the wrong people. "Of the $49.2 million committed in fiscal year 1981 to pay bonuses to Navy pilots," the GAO reported, "$27.9 million is being spent unnecessarily." Moreover, pilot shortages tend to come only when the airlines are doing well, as they are today. The Navy and the Marine Corps recognize this by sometimes varying pay according to airline industry pay levels. But when the Air Force had the option to go with the same targeting plan back in 1981, it instead persuaded Congress to award a 50-percent, across-the-board increase in aviation career incentive pay.

At least aviation career incentive bonuses are based on the right *theory* of what the military needs. The same can't be said of the Pentagon's "responsibility pay," which rewards officers for doing what officers are supposed to do—lead other men. As of 1982, about 900 officers were receiving "responsibility" bonuses of up to $200 a month. Rather than grant bonuses this carelessly, the Pentagon should provide incentives in those areas where it really is hard to retain the

(continued on page 22)

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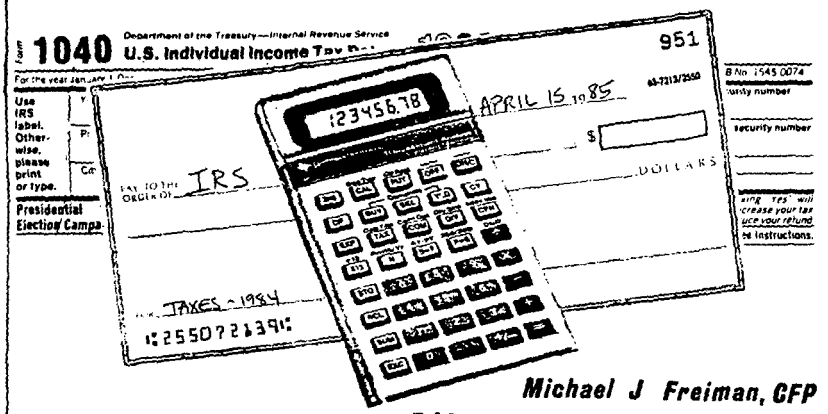

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best.

One reform OPM would like to institute that we should *not* permit is the granting of raises at the very highest levels of government. When I met with Mark Tapscott, OPM's spokesman, he enthusiastically reported to me that the Reagan administration had raised the pay cap from $50,000 to $68,700. Tapscott assured me that further raises would make it easier to attract top executive talent from the private sector. But such raises should be unnecessary. Anyone who isn't satisfied by having real responsibility in the federal government, not to mention the lavish perks that go with it, probably shouldn't be in a position of power in the first place. Moreover, if we start paying federal executives what executives in the private sector earn, they will soon find themselves, like their corporate counterparts, lacking the moral authority to demand sacrifices from those who work below them. Those at the top, no less than those at the bottom, are public servants. If we're going to raise anybody's pay, it ought to be those at the rock-bottom of the GS schedule.

Give 'em points

Once we reform pay so that it conforms more closely to both true "comparability" and merit, there will be no need to use pensions for anything more than what pensions are supposed to do: provide a reasonable income for retirees at a reasonable point in their lives. Still, we will have to recognize the hardships of those few who deserve early retirement, especially in the military. Just as we need to discriminate among different people and different jobs when it comes to pay, we also need to discriminate between the rigors of different work experiences in rewarding early retirement. The "point system" used at the end of World War II to bring the boys home provides an interesting precedent.

The point system succeeded because it managed to approximate something in a reasonably fair way that the military has since had trouble quantifying: the unusual rigors of being a soldier. For years, countries such as Britain have attempted to calculate this *je ne sais quoi* into their military pay scales, but in this country the Pentagon has never been able to wrestle the concept to the ground. When it has tried, the results have often been comical. A 1976 Pentagon compensation report even toyed with the notion of factoring in sexual deprivation: "Faced with the immediate possibility of personal annihilation amid the vast impersonal destruction of war, hedonistic drives and socially derived needs combine to make sexual deprivation a major stress." The result of the Pentagon's failure to quantify what it calls the "X-factor" has been the use of the idea as a vague rationalization for high compensation across the board.

The Pentagon should abandon its efforts to come up with a magic percentage that quantifies the hardship endured by soldiers and instead put those few soldiers who have endured real hardship at the head of the line for retirement. The World War II point system did exactly that. Troops around the world were interviewed in order to determine what they thought would be the fairest way to demobilize. "Their feeling, that the men who have served longest, have fought hardest, and who have children are the ones who should leave the Army first, is the touchstone of our program," announced Henry Stimson, secretary of war, at a press conference held two days after the victory in Europe. Given the divisiveness today over nearly every issue in our society that touches on fairness, it now seems extraordinary that back in 1945 more than 90 percent of the men interviewed by the War Department agreed on these basic principles. Here is how the plan was put into effect: Every enlisted man received one point for each month of service, one additional point for each month of overseas service, five points for each medal received, and 12 points for each child under the age of 18 waiting for him at home (with an upper limit of three). Those with the highest scores got out first. A slightly modified system was applied to officers. The result: 11 million soldiers came home in a reasonably orderly fashion, despite the fact that each of them desperately wanted to be the first.

It shouldn't take a war for us to agree on rational ways to treat people who work for the federal government according to their special needs and merits. To be sure, work changes over time, and people's values change, too. But the tools we use to make these judgments can also change with the times.

There's no use pretending that every federal worker is underpaid so that those few who really are can be brought up to the proper level. And it's dishonest to assume that every soldier has had to endure 20 years of combat duty and painful separation from hearth and home just to ensure that the few who do suffer hardship can get out early with a pension. If the federal government needs to be "comparable" to anything, it is to the same standard of fairness that applies to everyone else. ■

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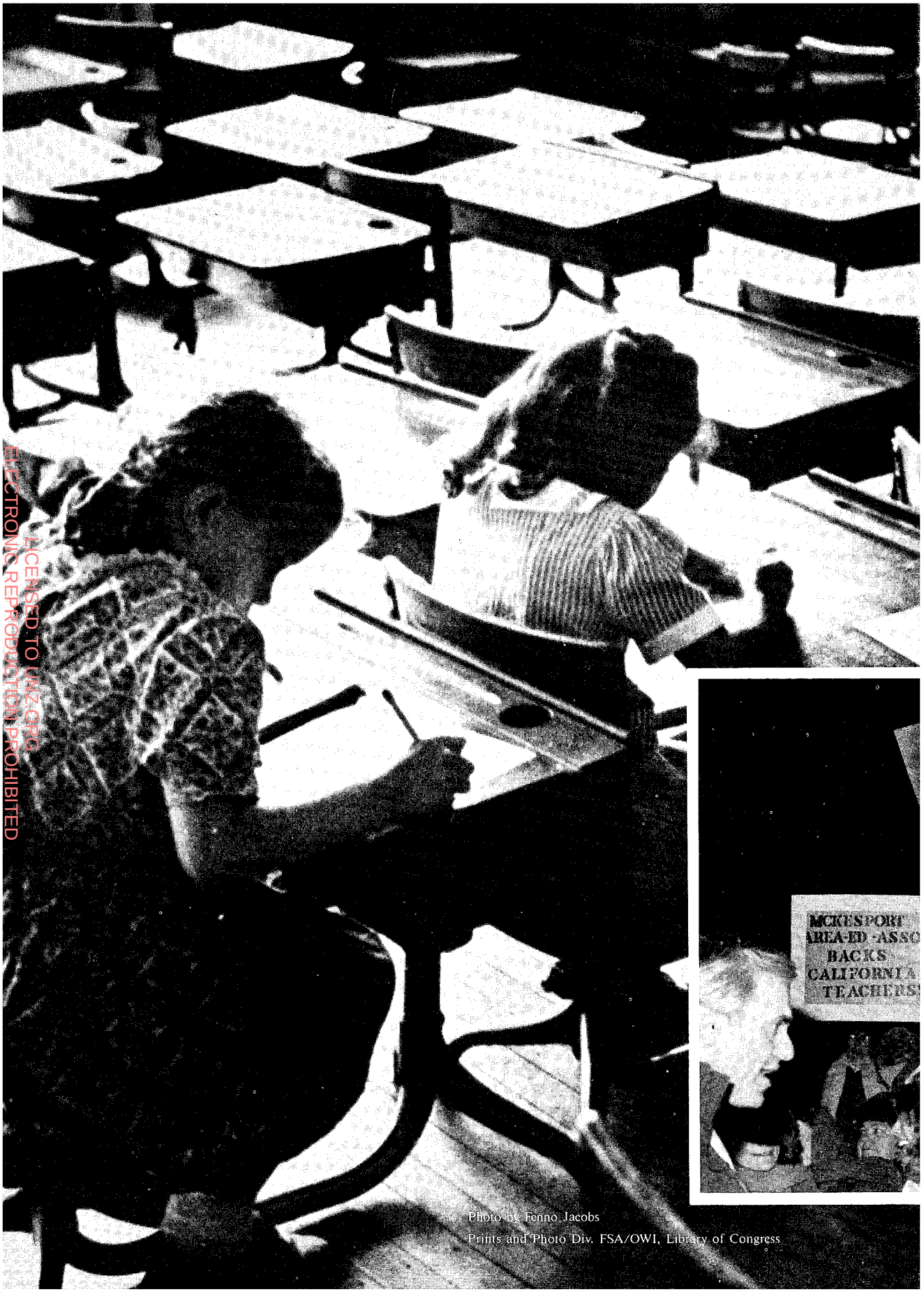

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Why the Largest Teachers Union Puts Its Staff First and Education Second

By Bill Boyton and John Lloyd

It's hard to think of a national problem that has provoked more debate than public education. If attention alone could solve problems, classrooms would be running smoothly now. But they aren't. Why?

One way to answer that question is to look at the organizations that are in the best position to improve public schooling—the National Education Association, for example. With 1.7 million members, the NEA is the nation's largest labor organization and could be a mighty force for constructive change. Since those members are classroom teachers, one might reasonably expect to find the NEA at the front of the crusade for educational reform.

John Lloyd and Bill Boyton are former executive directors of the NEA state affiliates in Kansas and Nebraska, respectively.

Many classroom teachers want to be on the side of change. But their union does not. In fact, the NEA has been the single biggest obstacle to educational reform in this country. We know because we worked for the NEA.

Until last year, when we quit, both of us held top positions as executive directors of state NEA affiliates. Leaving the organization was not an

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easy decision. The NEA had been the focus for our idealism and sense of mission for many years. But we finally realized that in its present state, teachers don't run the NEA. The staff does—as much to serve its own interests as the aspirations of teachers and the cause of educational reform. Reluctantly, we had to acknowledge that the NEA often gives its teacher-members a bad name.

Lasting scar

Chartered by Congress in 1857, the National Education Association functioned for more than a century as a staid professional society for school administrators as well as teachers. As in the schools, the administrators generally held the upper hand. Then, in the early sixties, the NEA underwent a radical change. The white gloves came off, the influence of administrators dropped, and the organization became a teachers' union, concerned primarily with pay and other bread-and-butter contractual issues. NEA affiliates in some states banished administrators permanently.

At the time, the change seemed necessary, even desirable. Teachers had been underpaid and treated shabbily for decades. In the sixties, these conditions had passed the point of endurance. Teachers with families—like ourselves—commonly moonlighted to make ends meet. Perhaps more galling than the financial hardship was the lack of respect for our work. "You teach. You don't know what a real job is," a school board chairman once snarled during a contract negotiation. "How am I going to rationalize it to the people who really work for a living why you want a salary increase?"

The NEA was also starting to feel competition from the American Federation of Teachers, which had mounted an aggressive organizing campaign and was taking away some of our members. The AFT was especially successful in large cities, causing the NEA's influential urban faction to demand retaliation. We looked with distaste upon the AFT's union-style organizing tactics. But they were working.

The watershed came in 1960, when the AFT won the right to represent New York City's 119,000 teachers. The battle of New York left a lasting scar. Many in the NEA leadership anticipated the AFT's launching a nationwide onslaught. We weren't going to let them win the war.

Real organizing was new for the NEA. The union hired Saul Alinsky, the legendary community organizer from Chicago, to fly around the country and show the staff how to get the job done. Alinsky preached a rough-and-ready credo and urged confrontation over conciliation. "You people don't know the first fucking thing about organizing," he would roar at proteges sitting at his feet. He told us that the only way we could get administrators to take us seriously was to escalate the conflict—threaten to strike, mount one if the threat didn't work, and take any other steps necessary to put pressure on the other side. Alinsky set the tone for the relations that have since evolved between teachers and the people who run the schools.

Some teachers were put off by our aggressiveness. We responded with slogans like, "You can't eat professionalism." Gradually, many teachers began to see our efforts in the larger context of sixties activism. In the annals of labor history, we would take a place beside the Flint strikers and the Wobblies. School boards weren't prepared for our hard-nosed tactics, and we won unprecedented settlements. From 1966 to 1976, our membership nearly doubled.

Flying Squadrons

Many of the gains achieved through confrontation were long overdue, yet you could sense the problems that lay down the road. Hostility and distrust descended over the bargaining table. Teachers became increasingly absorbed in the minutiae of contract rights.

The organizing drives also caused changes within the NEA. The negotiations, organizing, and legal affairs departments emerged as the fast tracks; education policy and research became a career backwater. For the former teachers who had proved their mettle in local organizing, joining the national staff was a heady experience. The NEA gave us a way to fight back against the school boards and administrators—and now we had *Washington* behind us. Working in "flying squadrons," we were on the road virtually full time from September to June, trying to add more teachers to our ranks.

There were no more school bells, brown bag lunches, and homeroom duties. We gained a sense of authority and independence. Generous salaries didn't dampen anyone's spirits, either. Today, a new NEA professional-level staff member makes nearly $20,000 more than a beginning teacher. The average field staff member gets $51,000 in base pay and a standard benefits package worth $25,000. Throw in healthy expense accounts and frequent travel, and you've got "hog heaven for

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an old classroom teacher," as one of our colleagues once put it. Another staff member observed that "the teachers movement. . . made a lot of people rich. Too bad none of them were teachers."

The national staff, in effect, works on commission. NEA dues are based on a fixed percentage of the average annual salary of an NEA classroom teacher. When teacher salaries go up, the national organization takes a cut, regardless of whether it really needs the additional money.

The inflated staff salaries did not arise by accident. They were a symptom of a fundamental shift in the balance of power within the NEA. In theory, state affiliates, such as the Nebraska State Education Association and Kansas-NEA, are autonomous; but in practice they have come increasingly under the influence of the NEA staff. One mechanism of control is the "Unified Services Program," a staff-sharing arrangement that functions as Washington's pipeline to the state organizations.

A quarter of the NEA's 6,000 staff members belong to "Uniserv." Their salaries are paid in part by the national organization and in part by the state affiliates. "Uniserv" staff do not officially report to Washington, but they know their advancement depends on Washington's opinion of their work. Since most staff want to climb the ladder, Washington generally prevails when policy differences arise.

While the national organization holds great sway over the states, state-level staff tend to manipulate local elected union officials. Until a few years ago, elected NEA officials weren't permitted to take full leave from teaching to serve the union. As part-time officials, they had to trust the staff to conduct daily business. In addition, elected officials could serve only a certain number of terms, and often no more than one year. Frequently, staff were dealing with novices who were dependent on their counsel. While the captains came and went, the crew ran the ship.

In the last few years, elected NEA officials in some states have tried to reassert themselves. Many now enjoy full leave from their teaching responsibilities and looser restrictions on the number of years they can serve. Still, these officials have had only limited success. For one thing, the state staffs have won contractual rights of their own, such as protections against dismissal and performance evaluations. In fact, NEA staff have more job security than the teachers. In one instance, an NEA local wanted to fire a Uniserv staff member but couldn't. The individual in question had built up so much severance pay that the local would have gone bankrupt by dismissing him.

Furthermore, some elected officials develop a taste for the NEA lifestyle and aspire to join the staff themselves once they leave office. They rarely cause much trouble. When a local official does

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A Harris poll found that 84 percent of teachers think it should be easier to fire incompetent teachers. You'd never know it from the positions of the NEA.

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show some independence, the staff can just sit tight until that individual returns to the classroom. On occasion, staff have helped hasten the arrival of a more cooperative replacement.

In Nebraska, for example, June VanderVeen, a newly elected state organization president, wanted classroom teachers, not professional staff, to sit on state educational policy bodies. Her sensible view was that teachers on the front lines know better than staff what changes are needed in the schools. Some state staff members tried to undercut VanderVeen by excluding her from important meetings and failing to inform her of pending legislative business. As the end of VanderVeen's one-year term approached, these staff members spread damaging rumors to diminish her chances of reelection.

VanderVeen lost. Now the local Uniserv staff director of the Salt Lake Teacher's Association, she denies that any of this occurred. But one of us (Bill Boyton) was acting executive director in Nebraska at the time and saw it happen.

VanderVeen wasn't an exception. At a three-day meeting in Scottsdale, Arizona in 1983, which we attended, the western state directors spent an entire afternoon discussing how to circumvent their elected superiors. There was some support for the idea that staff should withhold key memos. The Arizona director actually stood up and apologized for having regularly passed along such memos to his boss and promised to stop doing so. When one of us objected strenuously to the drift of this discussion, he was ignored.

Knaves and naivete

The influence of the staff within the NEA has had a great effect upon relations between teachers and their schools. An example was the teachers' strike in Franklin, Massachusetts in 1977, which received national media coverage. NEA staff played a major role in orchestrating the walkout.

Worried that declining enrollments would cause layoffs, the Franklin teachers had pressed for stronger seniority protection. When Massachusetts Teachers Association staff arrived to conduct negotiations, they urged the teachers to strike, in part to advance a top NEA legislative priority that year—a mandatory binding arbitration clause for all teacher contracts in the state. The teachers walked out, but with only moderate enthusiasm; by the strike's third day, many had abandoned the picket lines.

Like the cavalry of yesteryear, NEA staff members—including some from other parts of the country—thundered into town to provide reinforcement. The staffers also impersonated "concerned parents" who supported the teachers in comments to the press. We had a good laugh.

The teachers weren't so amused. A state judge levied fines that, by the end of the strike, were as high as $1,500 a day in individual cases. The judge also sent 67 teachers to jail. Some of the others fled town or went into hiding. Through it all, the NEA staff ignored the many teachers who wanted to call off the strike.

The local papers portrayed the school board as the bad guys for pressing the jailings. After 15 days, the board finally relented, and the press declared the teachers the winners. But the seniority clause the teachers finally won wasn't much of an improvement over the old one. They thought we had done them a great service by getting them out of jail and helping to pay their fines. But we had put them there in the first place. They served us more than we served them.

We found similar effects of staff influence in the political arena. The decision to endorse Walter Mondale in the 1984 Democratic primaries is a case in point. For months before the 1984 Representative Assembly—the NEA's annual convention—the organization was divided over whether to endorse Mondale formally or to give him an informal pledge of support. The organization had never endorsed a presidential candidate prior to its backing Jimmy Carter in 1976, and the membership was still uneasy about the idea. Some teachers, moreover, supported Gary Hart.

The NEA leadership was eager to throw the full weight of the organization behind Mondale. But they were wary of provoking a floor fight during the Assembly that would show division and dilute the value of the endorsement. So the staff proposed a return to the system used in 1976, when the vote was conducted by mail after the delegates had gone home. Separated from one another, they would be much less likely to mount a challenge to the leadership's recommendation. By mail vote, the NEA endorsed Mondale—but half of the teachers in the country voted for Reagan, according to a CBS News exit poll.

As the Mondale endorsement showed, the NEA staff frequently is less than respectful of the views of their members. At times, staff are openly contemptuous of teachers and their "naive" political views. The composition of the staff and membership helps explain this condescension.

Women make up two-thirds of the NEA membership. Yet 60 percent of the professional staff

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members at the national level are men, and men hold 90 percent of the state staff jobs. Male staff members—especially those who travel frequently—revel in tales of sexual exploits involving female teachers. At a closed-door meeting in Washington, D.C. in June 1983, Gary Watts, formerly director of these field staff members and a devout Morman, expressed his anguished view that the largest problem facing the organization was the number of men "dipping their pens in the company inkwell."

Moles

Since the representation battles of the sixties, the NEA has spent an inordinate amount of time combating its rival, the American Federation of Teachers, which represents about a third as many teachers. A former colleague of ours estimates that the NEA spent $25 million of its $400 million budget last year on "Fed fighting." As state staff members, we spent upwards of 60 percent of our time jousting with the AFT for teacher loyalty.

Representation battles do not always bring out the best in people. Like our counterparts in the AFT, we used smears and distortions to make the competition look bad. We don't know about the AFT, but the NEA was not above acts of questionable legality, either. Last year, a member of the NEA executive committee told us that he had been informed, in a closed-door session, that the organization had planted moles inside AFT locals in Washington, D.C. and Detroit. The two had worked their way up through the ranks and had even run for top elective offices. The Washington mole had his campaign literature printed at NEA headquarters on 16th Street, not far from the AFT. Our friend told us he was shocked that the committee had not demanded resignations from the officials responsible for this unethical conduct. The NEA now denies the episode, but we found it entirely believable in light of our experience in the AFT wars.

Had the undercover plot succeeded, the NEA would have gained an inside track on AFT planning and strategy. But what about public education? These Howard Hunt routines—indeed, the millions of dollars the two unions spend battling one another—do not advance the cause of educating our children by one iota. States with the greatest educational needs do not necessarily receive the most attention from the NEA because fighting the AFT comes first. Of the 11 states slated for priority attention and NEA "action money" in 1983, eight were on the list solely because the AFT was expected to wage membership challenges that year.

Mergers

This union warfare makes no sense from the teachers' standpoint, either. When locals of the two unions merged in Los Angeles in 1970, teachers found themselves in a much stronger position to get things done. "We haven't had the year-by-year bitterness," says Frances Haywood of the United Teachers of Los Angeles. "We are freed up to get on with the business of negotiating contracts and lobbying the state legislature." If other union locals followed the Los Angeles example, teachers might get better representation. And if teachers' unions spent less time fighting one another and more time addressing problems in the classroom, then they'd probably receive more support from the taxpayers.

Yet, when NEA and AFT affiliates merged in New York state in 1972, the NEA tried to counter the move by setting up a rival organization. Similarly, the NEA expelled its Florida affiliate when it joined with its AFT counterpart and set up a new union to try to win these teachers back.

You can't blame the NEA for defending itself. But you *can* blame it for not showing some statesmanship and making a genuine effort to resolve these hostilities.

Reform support

Many classroom teachers have virtually no interest in the contention between the AFT and the NEA; they are more concerned about doing their jobs better.

Contrary to public perception, most classroom teachers support efforts to improve teaching quality, even at the expense of their own job security. A 1984 Lou Harris poll of teachers found that 84 percent of the respondents favor changes that would make it easier to fire incompetent teachers, while 57 percent endorse periodic teacher competency tests. Despite some reservations, 71 percent say merit pay schemes would work "if there were an objective standard on which a teacher's individual merit could be judged."

It would be hard to guess any of this from the lobbying efforts of the NEA. Rather than build on the better instincts of its members, the NEA generally has resisted state-level reform. Two

(continued on page 32)

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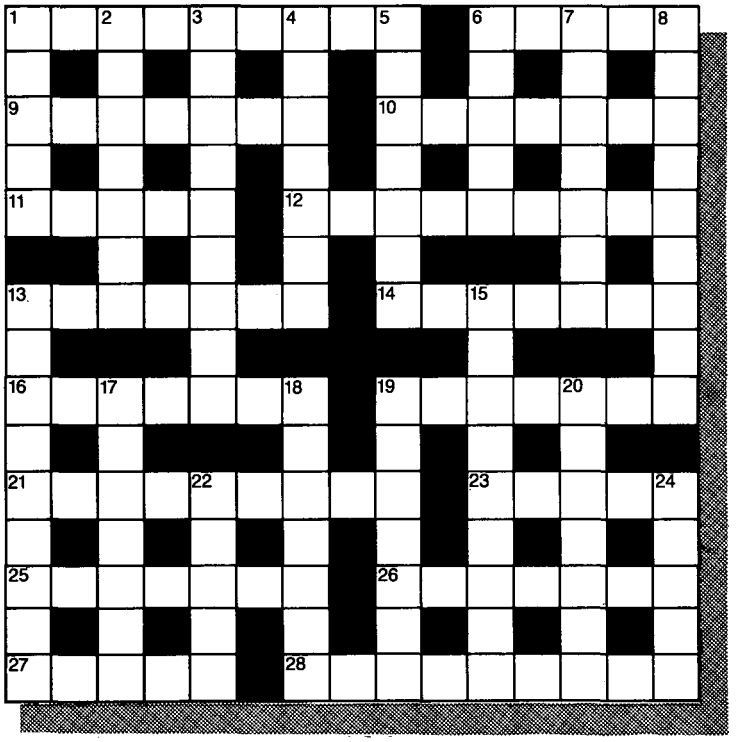
POLITICAL PUZZLE

by John Barclay

The numbers indicate the number of letters and words, e.g., (2, 3) means a two-letter word followed by a three-letter word. Groups of letters, e.g., USA, are treated as one word.



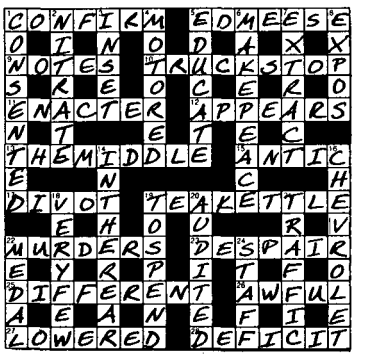
ACROSS

1. Manufactured from extra legislative proposal. (3, 6)
6. Controlled like some paper? (5)
9. Catch clumsy Z in bar. (7)
10. What disorderly cute dentist does with yacht expense. (7)
11. Reprehensible activity involved in smelly ingredients. (5)
12. Ache and groan wildly for Northern city. (9)
13. Less serious match? (7)
14. Most extensive construction of ten logs. (7)
16. Calm Communist surrounded moving axle. (7)
19. Supplied energy from unstable wee drop. (7)
21. Madly run at friend without effort. (9)
23. Separate one role? (5)
25. Revolving, twisting, nut ring. (7)
26. To give right to tie lent casually. (7)
27. Island produced from little little isle. (5)
28. Sporting event built tote strangely. (5, 4)

DOWN

1. Everything accomplished a lot around tea. (5)
2. Movie classification involved ring tax. (1, 6)
3. Levy on Mary Lou Retton? (6, 3)
4. Outdoor setting in opera. (4-3)
5. Deduction claimed improperly. (7)
6. Way to air commercial in South American city. (5)
7. To make milk set play part in deceased. (7)
8. Expressed another view about side dents. (9)
13. Log-netter made spectacles of himself. (9)
15. Modern fortress needs no more coal? (9)
17. A tiller composed of letters. (7)
18. Delicatessen given heart trouble initially for pleasure. (7)
19. Reward of type man arranged. (7)
20. Answer cat tore savagely. (5, 2)
22. At Hollywood parties Claude pours? (5)
24. Mashed tarte is delicious. (5)

Answers to last month's puzzle:



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examples:

• **Merit pay.** In 1983 Lamar Alexander, governor of Tennessee, proposed an ambitious package of reforms that centered upon a "career ladder" for teachers. All teachers would receive a pay raise of $1,000; but heftier increases of $4,000 and $8,000 would go to teachers whose classroom performance qualified them for "senior" or "master" status, respectively. (Currently Tennessee teachers, like those in most states, receive a salary based solely on their seniority and academic degrees.) At the same time, the bill would have revised the state's tenure system, which makes firing incompetent teachers extremely difficult.

Mobilizing its rank-and-file to descend upon the state legislature, the Tennessee Education Association succeeded in watering down the bill almost beyond recognition. Standards for the merit ladder were muddied, and quotas for the top rungs were abolished. Firing incompetent teachers may be as difficult as before. "It's by far the most difficult thing I've done in my life," Alexander said after the fight. "The idea seemed so simple—rewarding outstanding teachers" ("The Day the PTA Stayed Home," Hope Aldrich, June 1984).

The Lou Harris poll found that 87 percent of the teachers interviewed support a career ladder plan. Even the NEA's own in-house policy research unit has expressed guarded support for such plans. But NEA officials fear that enabling teachers to gain pay increases by their own efforts will diminish the union's middleman role as hard-nosed negotiator.

• **Opening up the profession.** The Arizona legislature is considering a bill that would open the teaching profession to more talented people. At present, you can't become a teacher in Arizona if you haven't taken special courses in educational theory and methodology, regardless of your college record or other valuable experience. The proposed bill would enable talented people to work for a year as "teaching associates" under close supervision and then become eligible for full teacher status. These teaching associates would still have to take roughly half the courses now required for a teacher's certificate, but they could spread these courses over the first few years of teaching.

The Arizona Education Association opposes any assault on the teacher certification orthodoxy, however. One reason is that such a change could hinder union recruiting efforts. The NEA recruits heavily at state teacher colleges, where it can appeal to large numbers of impressionable young people at one time. A teaching associate program that attracts independent-minded liberal arts graduates or 20-year IBM veterans could make organizing and recruitment that much more difficult, the organization fears.

The NEA has also opposed other reforms, such as testing teachers for competency. The Arkansas Education Association, for example, is working for repeal of a plan enacted last year establishing a special $663 million educational excellence fund on the condition that all public school teachers take basic competency exams.

When the NEA has supported innovations, they have generally reflected the institutional interests of the organization rather than the needs of students and teachers. Take, for example, the Department of Education, which Jimmy Carter promised the NEA in exchange for the union's endorsement in 1976. The new agency brought under one roof a number of existing federal programs, but it has had no apparent impact on the daily lives of classroom teachers and students. What the department did was provide NEA officials with additional visibility in Washington, a cabinet secretary to speak at their conventions, and new career paths through the federal bureaucracy.

Pay and pride

Twenty years ago, teachers needed to organize to get the pay and respect due them, just as autoworkers and brakemen had to organize earlier in the century. Today, teachers still need an organization to enable them to deal with their employers on equal terms. According to a study by Harvard University researcher Susan Moore Johnson, teachers think their local unions have improved salaries and job conditions. But Moore found that teachers also worry that the unions have polarized relations with administrators and protected classroom incompetence.

In other words, teachers want fair pay and treatment, but they also want to work in an atmosphere of cooperation rather than hostility. They want to work in schools they can be proud of. If they didn't, they wouldn't have become teachers. "You wonder," says Chester Finn, professor of education at Vanderbilt University, "how long the NEA membership will tolerate a leadership that defies the views of teachers and tarnishes the image of the profession at the same time." We've been asking the same question. That's why we knew it was time to leave. ■

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WHO'S WHO in the Administration

For over a year, a regulation guarding against drunken train crews like those that have caused serious accidents in recent years has been held up by bureaucrats in the Department of Transportation and the Office of Management and Budget. The chief villain is **Doug Ginsburg**, who has replaced **Christopher DeMuth** as administrator for the office of information and regulatory affairs at OMB....

Under Reagan, the OMB has weighed heavily in such health and safety matters, and that role will probably become greater. Reports from the White House indicate that the president intends to spend even less time on the job during his second term than he did during his first. There will be 10 days in Europe this spring, a month at the ranch in the summer, and as many other trips as the White House staff can find a plausible excuse for arranging. With the president away, more power will fall to **David Stockman**, the OMB director, and his colleagues in the administration's inner policy circle....The importance of those who manage the White House paper flow under **Donald Regan**, the chief of staff, will increase as well. A prime example is **Thomas Dawson**, Regan's executive assistant, whose office is right between Regan's and that of **Patrick Buchanan**, the new number-two man. One whose power will not increase is **David Chew**, who fills **Richard Darman**'s post as staff secretary, but who will have none of the influence Darman enjoyed as right hand man to **James Baker**....Another beneficiary of the president's absences will be **George Bush**, who may get more attention from the press with the boss away. Already, Bush is trying to do a job on **Rep. Jack Kemp**, who looms as one of his main competitors for the 1988 Republican nomination. Bush's lieutenants are lunching with journalists around town dropping hints about unseemly incidents in the congressman's past. Bush has an ally in buffering Kemp's initiatives in his favorite areas, tax reform and monetary policy. Both subjects fall in whole or in part under the jurisdiction of the Treasury Department, where Bush's 1980 campaign manager, James Baker is now in charge....Guess who chairs the White House committee that decides who our new federal judges will be? **Fred Fielding**, the former safe cracker....

In

WHITE HOUSE

Deputy Chief of Staff and Policy Director for the Vice President—**Frederick N. Khedouri** has been associate director for natural resources, energy, and science at the Office of Management and Budget.

Press Secretary to the Vice President—**Marlin M. Fitzwater** has been deputy White House press secretary for domestic affairs.

Press Secretary to the First Lady—**Jennefer Hirshberg** has been director of the office of public affairs at the Federal Trade Commission.

United States Trade Representative—**Clayton Yeutter** has been president and chief executive officer of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange.

Director of Public Liaison—**Linda Chavez** has been director of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.

AGRICULTURE

Assistant Secretary of Agriculture for Economics—**Robert L. Thompson** has been a senior staff economist for the Council of Economic Advisors.

ENERGY

Assistant Secretary for International Affairs and Energy Emergencies—**Jan W. Mares** has been assistant secretary for policy, safety, and environment.

General Counsel—**J. Michael Farrell** has been a vice president of Global USA, Inc.

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Chief of Staff—**Mac Haddow** has been executive administrative assistant to the secretary.

JUSTICE

Associate Attorney General—**William Bradford Reynolds** has been assistant attorney general for civil rights.

STATE

Ambassador to the United Nations—**Vernon A. Walters** has been an ambassador-at-large.

AGENCIES AND COMMISSIONS

Deputy Administrator, Environmental Protection Agency—**A. James Barnes** has been general counsel of the agency.

Administrator, General Services Administration—**Terence C. Golden** has been assistant secretary of treasury for administration.

Out

WHITE HOUSE

Chief of Staff to the Vice President—**David J. Murphy** has resigned to join the public relations firm of Gray & Co.

Press Secretary to the Vice President—**Peter Teeley** has resigned to start a consulting firm in Washington.

TRANSPORTATION

Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs—**Mari Meseng** has resigned to become vice president for corporate affairs of the Beatrice Companies.

AGENCIES AND COMMISSIONS

Executive Director, Pension Benefit Guarantee Corporation—**Charles Tharp** has resigned.

Member, Federal Trade Commission—**George W. Douglas** will resign in September.

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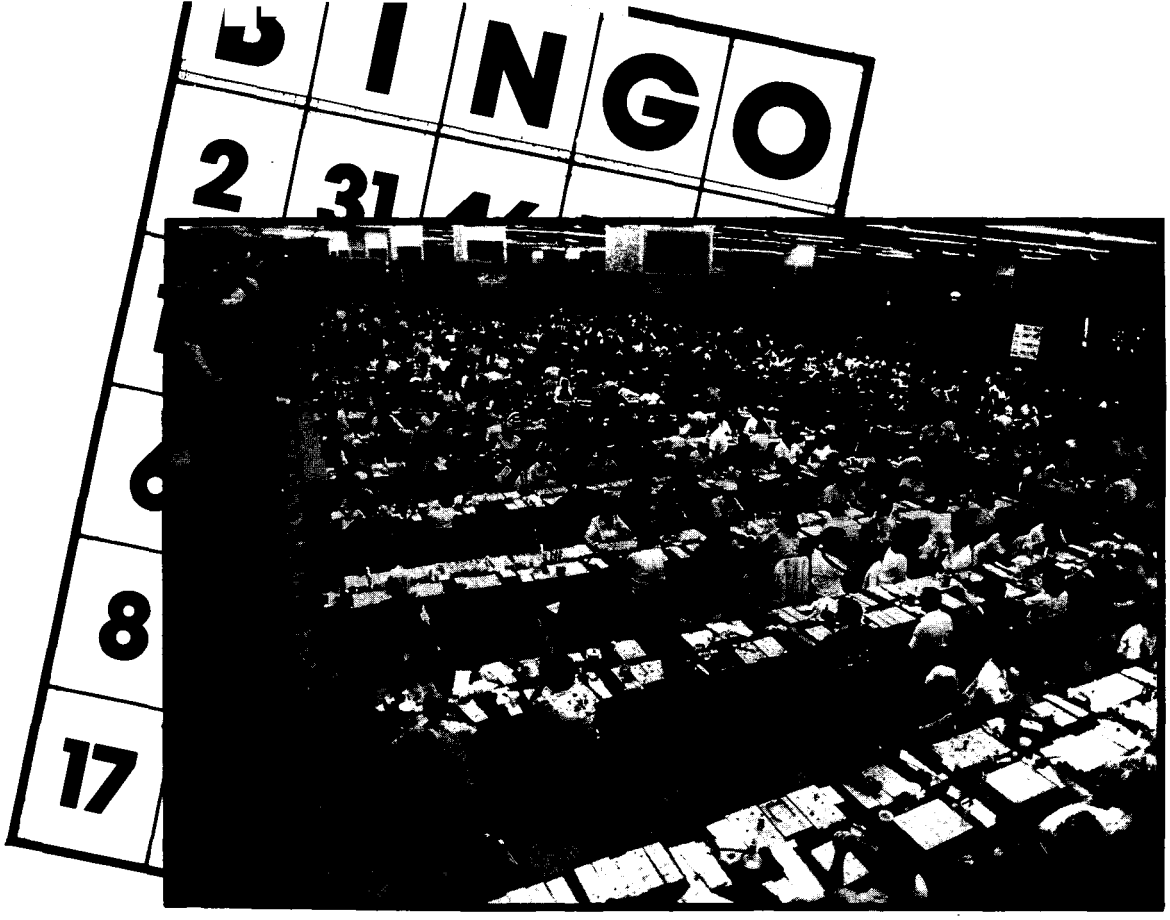

Photo—Hollywood, Fla. *Sun-Tattler.*

Indian Bingo Hall Showdown

BY SHERYL FRAGIN

Once upon a time the Florida Seminole Indians sold jewelry and wrestled alligators to make ends meet. Unlike more fortunate Western tribes, their land didn't yield oil or coal. It grew Datsun dealerships and chicken farms and every fast-food chain known to man, putting little change in the Indians' pockets. And so the tribe survived on government subsidies.

Today, just a few years later, the tribe has achieved relative financial security, netting $13 million a year, nearly 80 percent of which is self-generated. Reportedly, it is Florida's number-one corporate political contributor. Two high-powered lobbyists in Tallahassee look after tribal interests, and the tribal chairman shuttles between appointments with politicians and businessmen in his private plane. The source of the Seminoles' good fortune is as bizarre as the rest of this story. Theirs is the house that bingo built.

The tribe's flagship bingo hall is an immense concrete box, visually consistent with its setting on U.S. Route 441, a main drag in Hollywood, just north of Miami. On a typical day, the parking lot is lined with Buick Electras and late-model Caddies. Inside are long formica tables and orange plastic swivel seats. A middle-aged waitress in black shorts, orange T-shirt, with a frosted bouffant, bobs through the rows of expectant faces. At 3 p.m. one afternoon, the hourly jackpot was $11,700, about $100,000 shy of the record. This is no church fundraiser. It is a seven-night, five-matinee-a-week business, and, together with the tribe's two other bingo halls, it grossed $28

Sheryl Fragin is a New York writer.

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million in 1983.

Indian bingo and related enterprises have stirred a nationwide controversy that is opening old national wounds created by the white man's treatment of the Indians. That the bingo business exists at all reflects some Indians' determination to start winning at the white man's game.

The Seminoles have vast experience at losing that game. In 1830, they were one of the five unlucky "civilized" tribes to be driven off their homelands and resettled in the wilderness (now called Oklahoma), where they'd be out of the way. But the white man was pushing west so fast that soon the Indians were in the way again. Since deportation hadn't worked, the government came up with the reservation system, making Indians wards of the state and stripping them of their dignity, traditions, and self-sufficiency.

For a while, Congress shifted course and tried to force the Indians into the warp of American life. The General Allotment Act of 1887 divided up tribal lands among individual Indian families, who were supposed to become farmers. The Indians didn't take to farming, however, and started selling off their plots. The policy died a slow death, costing the Indians nearly 100 million acres in the process. Most tribes have since scraped by without any economic base other than government handouts—until the Seminoles figured out that the treaties that kept them isolated and impoverished could also give them a major economic advantage. When the tribe opened the first bingo hall in defiance of strict state bingo regulations, it gambled on being exempt.

The loophole opens

The Seminoles had to fight all the way to the Supreme Court to get their bingo. They were opposed by Robert Butterworth, then sheriff of Broward County—a man whose real crusade was to keep legalized gambling and its mob escorts out of South Florida. The opening of a gambling warehouse on a major thoroughfare in Butterworth's Broward County was thus a little like opening a Planned Parenthood clinic across the street from the Rev. Jerry Falwell's residence. With Florida literally awash with drug smugglers and their millions of dollars to be laundered, Butterworth's fears grabbed local officials in a way that is difficult to appreciate from afar.

By Florida law, an organization can run bingo games only twice a week, with a $100-per-pot maximum. Non-charitable groups have to recycle all the take into prizes. Butterworth didn't like the Seminoles' big-time version of the game and felt they were bound by state law, even though their bingo hall was on reservation land. In 1980, when the U.S. District Court in Fort Lauderdale disagreed with him, he went to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. When he lost that bid, he pressed onward to the Supreme Court, where the case was denied review in 1982. As the law stands, gambling operations on reservations are subject to state laws that are criminal or prohibitory in nature but not those that are civil or merely regulatory. In other words, because Florida allows *some* bingo operations, the law is "regulatory" and therefore does not apply on reservations. Casino gambling, on the other hand, is prohibited totally in the state and likewise on Indian land.

When the Supreme Court declined to hear the Seminole case, it gave a green light to tribes all over the country. Bingo halls spread like health spas, as Indians scrambled to replace federal financial aid that the Reagan administration had taken away. Reagan cut federal aid to Indian tribes by $113 million in his first budget, according to figures from the Office of Management and Budget. Indian leaders point out that the reductions were aggravated by the abolition of CETA, the Community Services Administration, and the Economic Development Administration, all of which provided considerable assistance to Indians. "Across the board," says Frank Ducheneaux, Indian affairs counsel to the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, "the programs which Indian tribes had begun to rely on, perhaps more than on the Bureau of Indian Affairs, have been cut for Indians by one-third or more."

Of the 291 tribes recognized by the federal government, at least 80 now run bingo operations. For most of them, the quality of their members' lives has improved vastly. Since opening their hall in December 1979, the Seminoles have paid off the mortgage on the $1 million building; created their own police force; started farming projects; and built libraries, two gyms, and senior citizen and daycare centers. After just one year of operation, the Shakopee Mdewakantan Sioux tribe of Minnesota paid out more than $1 million in dividends to its members, put another $1 million into tribal programs, and still was able to pay off its mortgage. Unemployment went from 67 percent to zero. It would be hard to find a more stunning example of the kind of entrepreneurship and self-help that President Reagan so eloquently promotes.

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'Private sector' problems

So why isn't everybody happy? "It's just common sense," says Butterworth. "If you're going to have a $1 billion cash, unregulated industry in this country, it's going to be ripe for organized crime." That suspicion has plagued the infant industry since its inception. The federal government, moreover, has helped give it credence. Through a particularly thorny Catch-22, the government has pushed some tribes into the arms of the very investors that Butterworth wants to keep off his turf.

When the Seminoles were looking for start-up money, they went first to the Bureau of Indian Affairs; the bureau turned them down because it deemed the investment too risky until the games had survived a court test. The Indians then struck out with private bankers, because with all reservation land in trust with the U.S. government, the Indians have no collateral. Backed against the wall, the Seminoles finally borrowed from anyone who would put up money and traded away 80 percent of their future profits in the deal. (That figure was later renegotiated down to 45 percent.)

"The irony," says former tribal attorney Stephen Whilden, "was that in 1982 the Supreme Court ruled on *Seminoles* v. *Butterworth* and for all practical purposes ended the risk. So now the government would be willing to loan the money or guarantee the loans, but the money's not there because the new administration cut those programs."

The "private sector" has been delighted to fill the void. Investors have formed ad hoc bingo management firms (which dissolve and reappear with astonishing speed) and are scouring Indian country for receptive tribes. The bingo brokers put up the money in exchange for about a 40 percent interest for anywhere from 7 to 20 years.

Some of the people showing up on management contracts have given local law authorities pause because of their former connections with reputed mob figures. Two of the five general partners who started Seminole bingo, for example, were once co-stockholders in a Miami hotel with the late Meyer Lansky. Two principals of New England Entertainment Co., which originally managed the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux hall, between them had felony convictions ranging from conspiracy to defraud the government to to forging Treasury checks. In South Florida, two convicted felons registered a new bingo management company with the Securities and Exchange Commission, but couldn't get underwriting. While neither local officials nor the FBI have proven links to organized crime in these cases, the aroma of corruption persists.

Former Seminole attorney Whilden, who is now something of a bingo mogul, says he can't dispute that large amounts of cash tend to attract people who want to steal it. "That explains why people rob banks instead of Christian Science Reading Rooms," he smirks. "Butterworth's answer was to throw the baby out with the bathwater—'let's have no money on the reservation and then organized crime won't want to go on the reservation.' The reservation said, 'we don't like that solution.' The Indians' attitude is, 'we've never been rich, but we think rich would be better.'"

G-man inertia

While guilt in South Florida exists mainly by association, at another gaming tribe, the Cabazon Band of Mission Indians in California, the issue is more clear-cut. The victims, moreover, have been the Indians themselves.

In late June 1981, tribe member Alfred Alvarez and two friends were killed execution style, one bullet to each head, shortly after Alvarez started publicly accusing the Cabazons' bingo management company of wrongdoing. Alvarez had been vice chairman and security chief for the tribe and loyal to the Cabazons' white business adviser, John Philip Nichols. One month before his death, Alvarez gave a series of interviews to the local Indio *Daily News*, charging Nichols with skimming money from the bingo hall and casino. Alvarez told the paper "my life is on the line." "He began to call me at night," says his sister, Linda Streeter, who had opposed Nichols, "and tell me that, unfortunately, I probably was right. He had started digging into the paperwork in the office at night, and he was finding very unusual things to do with coal deals from Kentucky and gold deals from foreign countries."

For three years, Streeter badgered local authorities, the BIA, and anyone who would listen. Finally, in June, she persuaded California Governor George Deukmejian to appoint a special team to look into possible organized crime involvement in the murder. Streeter has claimed all along that a former tribal employee told her he had made the payoff for her brother's assassination. The California Department of Justice investigative team, however, was ready to close the case after a cursory review. State in-

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vestigators didn't bother to question a former casino employee, Rocco Zangari, who has been described by law enforcement officials as a "mob enforcer." Frank Brock, a special agent assigned to the case, said in October that Zangari is irrelevant to the investigation.

Brock is more attentive these days. Early this year, Nichols pled no contest to two counts of solicitation of murder in cases unrelated to the Cabazons. The Indio Police Department conducted those investigations and has undoubtedly put pressure on the state team.

On top of Nichols's criminal activities, he still hasn't delivered on his promises to the tribe. He burst upon the reservation in 1978, at the invitation of the Cabazons' chairman, sounding like a messiah to the impoverished, 22-member tribe. "This man is very intelligent and has a Jim Jones charisma," says Streeter. "He makes you feel that as a small tribe we could defeat the world and the government, that we could send our money to foreign countries and they'd never know where it is. The only unfortunate part is we don't know where it is either." Under Nichols's tutelage, the Cabazons watched first their cigarette shop end up in bankruptcy and later their casino. All the Indians have to show for these operations is a $650 dividend payment in 1980, says Streeter.

The Tallahassee connection

The Cabazons' entanglements are not typical, but in 1983 they prompted the Justice Department in Washington to propose legislation that would have subjected Indian gambling to state regulation, effectively wiping out the industry. Help came from an unexpected quarter, however, in the person of James Watt, then secretary of the interior. Gambling is not the sort of activity one would expect to find endorsed by a far right ideologue. But bingo represents the first stirrings of Indian economic independence, and Reaganites tend to backslide on the question of sin when it is of the acquisitive variety. Besides, the bingo profits mask the effects of Reagan's severe budget cuts. Watt intervened, and Justice backed down.

The tribes are worried that Justice will try again, or that Congress, which has complete authority over Indian matters, will wipe out bingo on its own initiative. Bingo supporters are trying to deflect concern by working out their own regulatory scheme.

Arizona Rep. Morris Udall introduced a bill in November 1983 that would have made the interior secretary responsible for approving bingo contracts and running background checks on investors and management. Interior didn't like that idea, according to Deputy Assistant Secretary John Fritz, who heads the BIA, because it doesn't want to be a regulatory agency. Indians didn't like the bill because it held management to a salary rather than a piece of the action and was likely to dry up financing. Justice didn't like it because it didn't go far enough. The bill died in committee, but Udall is thinking about introducing a revised version in this session of Congress.

To some extent, this flurry of activity is inspired by genuine fears of mob infiltration. But something else is at work here, too—namely, business competition. Tribal sovereignty gives Indian businesses a competitive edge over their neighbors. The more successful a tribe becomes, the more legislatures are pressured to do something.

Smoke shops were the cornerstone of the movement to turn tribal sovereignty into an economic advantage, and again the Seminoles were among the pioneers. In 1977, they opened their first drive-through, 60-hour-a-week, tax-free cigarette shop. Cars lined up 20 deep to buy cartons at a $1 discount. The tribe was soon drawn into a protracted court battle by a private taxpayer, who also happened to be the sheriff—Butterworth's predecessor, Ed Stack. The courts ruled that tribes were exempt from paying the state tax.

But the Seminoles weren't about to entrust their precious loophole to the good graces of the courts any more than the real estate industry entrusts its loopholes to the whims of Congress. They hired Stephen Whilden, a veteran of the State Department and the Office of Management and Budget, in 1977 to teach them how to play politics. A drawling, sardonic southern lawyer in the Sam Ervin mold, Whilden showed the tribe how to make friends in high places. By 1982, the year Whilden was fired in a power struggle, the Seminoles were giving $48,300 to state political candidates, according to *The Miami Herald*. The Seminoles have also made large contributions to national political campaigns, funneling the money through members' checkbooks to circumvent federal election laws. (Whilden doesn't think that little dance was really necessary and says the tribe follows the letter of the campaign laws and ceilings as a "courtesy.")

Suddenly the Seminoles had allies in Tallahassee. After the cigarette case was settled in court, the Florida legislature volunteered a state law reinforcing the Seminoles' tax exemption.

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Likewise, before the appellate court ruled on bingo, two state congressmen introduced a bill revising Florida bingo regulations, with an amendment exempting Indian bingo. "It took us a heavy lobbying effort to get that vote off the calendar the last day," says an exasperated Butterworth.

Condos and dogtracks

Whilden and the Seminoles' leader, Chairman James Billie, were an inventive pair, plotting business deals to exploit the Indians' status. One especially creative scheme had the Seminoles buying a local golf course, persuading the BIA to put it into trust, and then leasing it to a developer of retirement condominiums. The developer, building on reservation land, wouldn't be bound by zoning laws or building codes. The deal fizzled, leaving in its wake at least as many versions of the story as there were characters involved.

In any event, Florida lost more than $12 million in tax revenue because of reservation cigarette sales during the 1982-1983 fiscal year. Other states are getting nervous. New York tribes such as the St. Regis near Massena, the Shinnecocks on Long Island, and the Alleganys outside Buffalo are selling goods ranging from designer jeans to stereos to gasoline, tax free. A cold war is growing between reservation and nearby merchants. In Buffalo, the Campbell Oil Co. and two gas station owners have jointly filed suit in U.S. District Court to wipe out the tax advantages of an Allegany retailer.

As tribes consider projects like shopping centers, dog tracks, and, in Nevada, brothels, they have a reasonable concern that the courts will start to take a dimmer view of their good fortunes. They are also concerned about the states. Arizona, for example, has found a way to crimp the Indians' cigarette tax exemption by creating legal complexities for their wholesale distributors.

Arizona has also been unsuccessful in its attempt to legislate Indian bingo out of existence. The state attorney general, Robert Corbin is worried not only about organized crime but also about the plight of church-basement charity bingo, which can't hope to compete with high-stakes Indian games. Complicating the issue is the way "charitable" bingo can attract unsavory elements, too. The state recently had to shut down three illicit bingo operations run by charitable groups.

"I get accused of being anti-Indian," Corbin says. "Hell, I'm one-eighth Indian myself, from Kentucky. White man wiped my tribe out a long time ago. I just felt they're citizens of our state, and we should all be doing things equally here."

One country, one law

Recently, members of the Arizona state Republican party passed a resolution calling for annulment of all treaties with Indian tribes. The Republican executive committee eventually overturned the resolution, but that it was proposed at all demonstrates how volatile bingo and the larger sovereignty issue have become. If the Florida legislature is more sympathetic than Arizona's, one reason is that the Seminoles have shown more political savvy in spreading around their cash. Like other newly entrepreneurial tribes, the Seminoles have been blasted by local news media, which depict individual tribe members as rolling in bingo or cigarette money. But the stories have yet to have much impact in Tallahassee, where the Indians have attended to their friends.

The Seminoles are stung by these swipes in the press. Through bingo they are compensating for federal budget cuts, much the way states are with lotteries. They aren't flashing wads of cash or driving fancy cars or buying designer clothes.

Still, it's hard to be ecstatic about the unscrupulous business partners the Indians have enlisted to achieve solvency. And invoking tribal sovereignty to defend bingo halls does seem a perversion of that principle. For years, though, sovereignty had been used to cloak the oppression and effective internment of the tribes. The Indians simply learned how to play the game.

Ideally, those on one side of Florida's Route 441 would live under the same rules as those on the other. The Indians would participate in the larger community as equals, protected—and governed—by American laws. But such a scenario has been tried before, with disastrous results. When several northwestern and California tribes were terminated between 1954 and 1962, they were promptly bilked out of major chunks of land by non-Indian speculators, who jumped at the chance to pick up rich timberland for a song. The Grand Rondes in Oregon sold off property for $5 an acre, which would cost about $5,000 an acre to buy back today. If the Indians shouldn't have special legal exemptions, then they deserve further compensation for the deplorable treatment they have endured. Righting past wrongs is going to require more than Americans have been willing to give thus far. ■

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TIDBITS AND OUTRAGES

He sent Judge Green an application to Katherine Gibbs

Richard W. Goldberg, undersecretary of agriculture, last month criticized U.S. District Court Judge June L. Green for handing down a ruling on wheat sales that will result in higher shipping costs for American exporters. A man would have understood the case better, Goldberg said. "This is an illustration of why women shouldn't be allowed to go to law school, let alone be appointed to the bar."

The company is selling the same list to Melvin Belli

A new computer service company in Chicago will enable physicians to check the backgrounds of prospective patients to see if they have histories of filing malpractice suits. "We are absolutely not developing anything like a blacklist," said the president of the service.

James Watt's latest business venture: All-New Native American Fertilizer

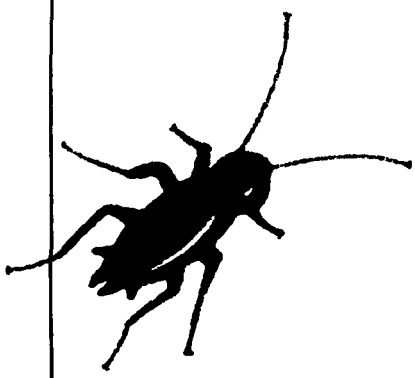
The Bureau of Indian Affairs, part of the Interior Department, will build 2,900 homes for Native Americans next year. But because of budget cuts, the houses will not be equipped with toilets.

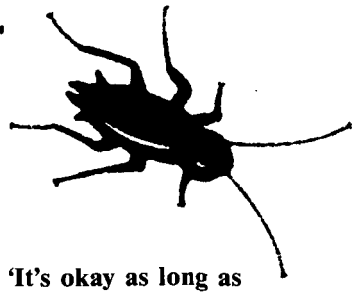
Not only that—her rock video offers have been suspiciously unattractive

Rep. Mary Rose Oakar last month chastized Clarence Pendleton, chairman of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, for having "demeaned and trivialized basic rights affecting millions of people." Speaking at a House committee hearing, Oakar also said she was concerned over whether Geraldine Ferraro "was paid as much as the male performers" in her recent Pepsi television commercial.

He added that they threw in a set of Ginzu knives at no extra charge

The Air Force last month caught Boeing charging the American taxpayer $884,579 for a 66-item tool kit. After renegotiating the deal, Boeing dropped the price to $557,000; a pair of pliers that had cost $5,096 plummeted to $1,496. "What you're not recognizing," a major general told *The Washington Post*, "is that the original proposal was significantly higher."





Dr. Ruth Westheimer says: 'It's okay as long as nobody's hurt.'

American Cyanamid Co. held a conference last month in the Chinese Room of the Mayflower Hotel in Washington on the "relationship between the German cockroach and the human race."

He's finally learned how to stay out of the woodshed

The House of Representatives proposed last month that organizations that set up presidential libraries bear the cost of maintaining them. Speaking for the White House, David Stockman said the administration backed the measure as long as the future Ronald Wilson Reagan Library is exempt.

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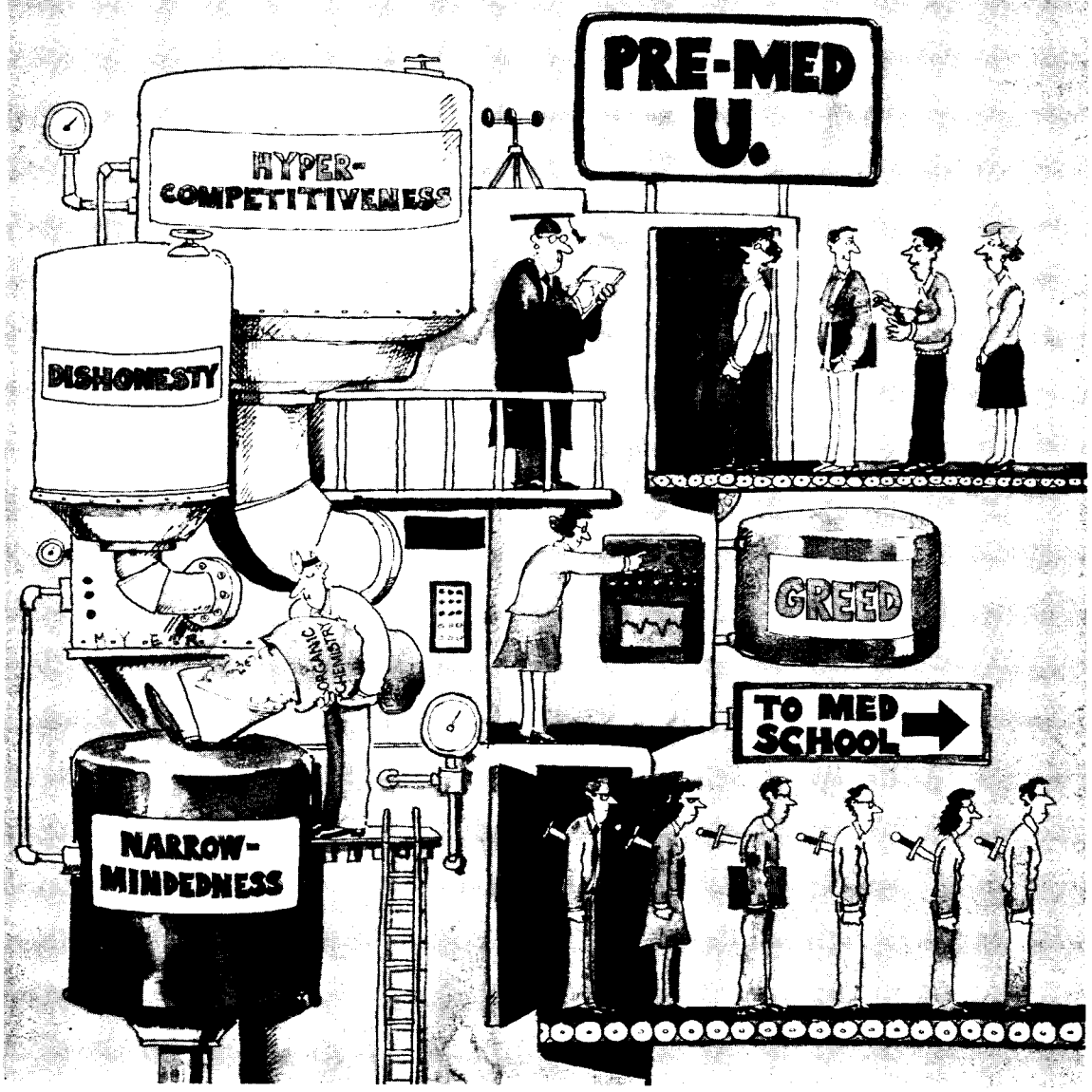

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The Premed Machine

By Paul M. Barrett

On a cool spring evening, with mid-terms looming, a Penn premed talks about the kid they call "the Machine":

"Unbelievable. He sits down, opens the chem book and doesn't move for 12 hours. He's great, and you know why he's great? Because he forgot how to be bored. The kid *does not get bored.* He doesn't try to understand it. He just puts what's in the book in his brain. . . 3.98 GPA. That means one B. Seventy-eight on the MCATs [Medical College Aptitude Test]. Seventy-eight MCATs is not human."

No one goes one-on-one with the Machine. At five feet, three inches and perhaps 100 pounds, he's the Dr. J of the premed big leagues.

It's a game that can be played different ways. At Stanford several years ago, premeds were blamed for staging a bomb threat to buy more time to study for a chemistry exam. According to the American Association of Medical Colleges, hundreds of wildly adulatory letters of recommendation are forged every year. Occasionally, says an AAMC executive, students fake professors' letters maligning classmates with whom they're competing. Among premeds, says a chemistry professor at the University of Pennsylvania, you will find some "true evil."

"It's a feeling like when you look around a big lecture hall," says Dan Guttmann, a senior at Penn, "and you know all these people because they're in all your premed classes, and it's kill or be killed."

Of the prestigious career tracks that entice the brightest students on the best campuses, medicine has the greatest impact in shaping undergraduates' lives. Grades make the man in premeds' eyes, because that's what they perceive the medical schools are looking for. Caught up in fierce competition for class rank, many students lose sight of the world beyond the library and lecture hall. College becomes a survival test, often dull and demeaning. Worse, the premed culture takes standard-issue high school overachievers and injects them with traits we increasingly complain about in our physicians: narrow-mindedness, cynicism, dishonesty. Young people who distrust their classmates, who cheat as if by second nature, who feel the world owes them a lifelong debt of gratitude—these are tomorrow's doctors.

Someday, the Machine will have an M.D. But you won't be able to get in to see him for months.

Ferocious geeks

The University of Pennsylvania doesn't "have your Widener Library [Harvard] or your classics [Yale], but we do what we do well—and that's pre-professional," says Frederick Brutcher, who teaches organic chemistry at Penn. The word gets out to students, who arrive at the sprawling campus in West Philadelphia like pilgrims at the Holy Land, the anticipation of salvation burning in their eyes. Officials at the university estimate that out of a freshman class of 2,000, 900 students consider themselves premed. Two-and-a-half years later, the 300 or so who have survived the grades gauntlet submit medical school applications. Penn is the perfect place to hear premeds

Paul M. Barrett is an editor of The Washington Monthly. *Richard Ehrle assisted with research for this article.*

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tell their own stories.

"When I arrived, I lived in Ware College House, which is premeds exclusively," says Steve Kolenik. "It's full of geeky kids who look at each other and get more geeky. By the end of freshman year, I was a complete wreck. I went home for vacation, and I had lost 15 pounds.... It just got insane with everyone studying the same things at the same time. You look around and you start to be unsure of your abilities. Sophomore year, I was more confident. I knew how to get the As, but with people around you studying like crazy, you just keep at it. It becomes a habit." Kolenik, a senior majoring in biology, got into med school; he's a success.

Scott Epstein had a rougher time. "It's the atmosphere that did it to me," he says. "You don't know what it's like when you see these huge classes. Sophomore year it really hit." Epstein speaks softly; at several points, his voice cracks with emotion. "Everyone is fighting everyone else. I guess my grades went because of that, even though I was trying to beat the mean like everybody else.... I tensed up. I got two Cs in bio. I had two terrible professors; they were weeding us out as if they were working for the medical school or something. They seemed to enjoy failing people, giving Cs and Ds. You get the feeling that no one is on your side."

Epstein, who recovered from his sophomore slump to put together a respectable academic record, hasn't gotten into any of the 12 medical schools to which he applied, although he's on a few waiting lists. He plans to attend a college of osteopathy, a system of quasi-medical physical manipulation based on a theory that diseases are due chiefly to loss of "structural integrity." "I guess I'm getting paid back for not doing well my sophomore year," says Epstein, "but I have friends who haven't gotten in anywhere. At least I'm into a place."

Penn isn't the only school infected by the premed syndrome. C. H. Haagen, a Wesleyan University researcher, surveyed the premed scene at several small liberal arts colleges, including Wesleyan, Amherst, and Swarthmore. Haagen found that premeds feel greater stress than students interested in other occupations and are more likely to alter course selections and extracurricular activity to improve their shot at med school admission. Fifty-three percent of the 1,065 students interviewed felt many of their peers disliked them, while 24 percent believed their instructors didn't like them. Forty-five percent of students who abandoned plans to become a doctor did so because they didn't want to join a profession filled with such grimly ambitious people.

Despite the evidence, some people in medical education are skeptical about the extent of the premed problem. "There are kernels of truth, individual cases," says Dr. Gerald S. Foster, director of admissions at Harvard Medical School, "but the [premedical] thing is often blown out of proportion.... I see scores and scores of marvelous students." Steve Kolenik, who's on the waiting list at Harvard and would like to hear from Dr. Foster, is one such marvelous student. He's done advanced lab research and is fascinated by heart surgery. He chose medicine because he wants to do something "that helps make people feel better." But as Kolenik himself admits, even for the marvelous ones, the premed experience fosters extreme behavior that may permanently affect their attitudes toward medicine.

Killer weeds

Premeds know the numbers with icy precision: each year 35,000 students apply nationally, and fewer than half get in. So premeds play it safe, generally majoring in science (three-quarters of those admitted concentrate on science). Some are genuinely interested in biology and chemistry; but many hide in those subjects, insulating themselves from anything not specifically required of them by medical school admissions committees. Steve Kolenik describes why a premed would be afraid to major in philosophy and work in chemistry on the side: "You think you'll get behind before you even start, that the science majors will have a head start." In fact, the acceptance rate of humanities and social science majors is as high as or slightly higher than that of science majors. But the raw numbers can appear discouraging: in 1983, 212 English majors and 149 history majors were accepted nationally, compared to 5,948 in biology.

Medical schools traditionally pay special attention to applicants' grades in certain difficult science courses—the "weeders." As a result, premeds take a lot of nonscience "guts"—courses known to be easy As—because they say they need all their energy to survive the weeders. And of all the weeders, organic chemistry is the most merciless. Uniformly required by medical schools, organic is the GPA-crunching monster that haunts premeds on every college campus. Many students consider a C in organic fatal to medical

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'There are professors who are anti-premed. If they can kill off a few quietly, they sort of enjoy it.'

aspirations. It's "the course of broken dreams," says Frederick Brutcher of the Penn chemistry department.

Organic chemistry is the study of how elements fit together and break apart in chemical reactions involving carbon. The course requires rote memorization of a complex algebra of chemical equations. A cornerstone of the chemist's profession, organic came to prominence in the 1920s and '30s, when new industrial applications were discovered for chemistry and universities expanded their faculties in the field. Physicians must have some grounding in general chemistry to understand topics such as biochemistry and pharmacology. But organic chemistry, with its detailed treatment of carbon bonding, has almost no relevance to medical practice. This is an open secret, unknown, it seems, only to the premeds who take the course. "I've asked many [physicians], 'Do you use organic chemistry in your day-to-day work?' " says Brutcher. "No, they don't. . . . In my humble opinion, it's used more as a screening course—that's all."

Brutcher and his academic colleagues see a transcendent beauty in the innumerable patterns of carbon bonds, but little of that wonder filters down to their students. Brutcher readily concedes the point: "I say to [students], 'I know you come to get two things: a high grade and a good recommendation letter.' " He acknowledges the frustration a research scientist feels teaching students who don't respect his field and, to make matters worse, will probably one day make a lot more money than he does. "Every scientist is looking for his *wunderkind*," says Brutcher. "He wants the next Einstein. . . .The premed has no meaning in my field." Although he is himself a genial man, popular with his pupils, Brutcher confirms the students' perception that some professors have it in for premeds. "There are organic chemists—let me be blunt—who are anti-premed," Brutcher says. "There's a percentage who do enjoy the power, and if they can kill a few quietly"—Brutcher's voice drops to a whisper—"in my humble opinion, they sort of enjoy it."

Not surprisingly, a class like organic brings out the worst in students. Timmy Sullivan, a fourth-year student at the Tufts University School of Medicine, recalls that things got ugliest during organic lab sessions. Crucial equipment disappeared in the dark of night, Sullivan says. "One guy had worked on an experiment for five weeks, and then one morning, it was gone." Brutcher says out-and-out sabotage is rare, but psychological warfare common: "The girl comes down to the front of the class; she's crying. She says, 'Dr. Brutcher, I'm sitting in the back of the class and I didn't hear what you said. I turned to this guy, and I told him, "I missed what Doc said." He said to me, "I will not tell you. You're competing with me for a seat in medical school." ' This sort of thing happens, oh yes."

The anecdotal evidence, if anything, probably understates the level of anxiety and twisted behavior. Cheating is a good case in point. Professors concede that it occurs; Brutcher says that the most common technique is the surreptitious scrawling of key information on lecture hall chairs so that it is available for easy reference during exams. Students describe other, more daring infractions, including circulation of test questions obtained illegally. But the statistics tell an even grimmer tale. A recent study of 400 medical students by doctors at two Chicago medical schools revealed that *88 percent* of the subjects had cheated at least once while they were premeds. The researchers found widespread cynicism among their subjects, as demonstrated by frequent agreement with statements such as, "People have to cheat in this 'dog-eat-dog' world."

Walking wounded

Four years of being a premed takes its toll. Again, take cheating as an example. The Chicago study demonstrated that although the frequency of student cheating dropped in medical school, the majority of students continued to cheat. "The most disturbing finding," the researchers concluded, was that "there was a continuum from

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cheating in college, to cheating in medical school in didactic areas, to cheating in clerkships in patient care. . . .Cheating in medical school may be a predictor of cheating in medical practice." From crib notes in organic chemistry to Medicaid fraud and fudged results of medical research: the connection may be there.

More subtle links exist between the premed regimen and bad medical care. As a society, we're growing increasingly dissatisfied with our doctors. A study described in a recent Institute of Medicine report on medical education found that 64 percent of a large sample of families were unhappy with their doctor-patient relationships. One-third to one-half of the families had changed doctors because of dissatisfaction over the physicians' personal qualities. While premeds are learning to cheat, they're also becoming narrow, driven people, uncomfortable dealing with others. Dr. Carole Horn, admissions director at the George Washington University Medical Center, says that undergraduates put through the premed mill have difficulty providing patients with the "trusting, caring feeling people like to get from a doctor."

In a 1983 report on problems with medical education, Derek C. Bok, president of Harvard University, also stressed that future doctors are not adequately prepared to deal with the human elements of medical practice. Bok noted that many patients who visit primary-care physicians have no physical ailment. Yet research indicates that many doctors overlook significant emotional and cognitive disorders. Bok added that "through lack of empathy and concern," physicians may "fail to detect these psychological and social considerations [and]. . . misperceive the nature of the case before them and resort to unnecessary surgery, overuse of drugs, and needless diagnostic tests."

Recent developments in medicine make it only more imperative that students entering medical school understand the world from a humane, as well as a technical, perspective. Premeds receive little encouragement to begin thinking about topics such as the use of extraordinary life-sustaining techniques, the allocation of scarce medical resources, or the use of prenatal diagnoses in making abortion decisions.

The emphasis on memorizing in premedical education not only can hinder premeds in dealing with human and ethical problems, but it may also hurt them as scientific investigators. "The kind of knowledge they pump into you doesn't stay in your brain very long," explains Harry Moscovitz, a second-year student at Mt. Sinai School of Medicine. A recent study at Case Western Reserve University found that second-year medical students forget 90 percent of the factual items they learn in lecture courses by the time they graduate two years later. Acknowledging such evidence, several major medical schools are experimenting with new curricula that stress problem-solving in a small-group setting, rather than memorizing information presented in large lecture classes. Premeds, however, are still put through courses designed specifically to test their ability to retain raw fact.

A final result of the premed experience is a strong sense of resentment on the part of some undergraduates. Many Penn premeds say that they realize they are not well liked as a group by nonscience students and that they miss out on the more pleasurable aspects of college life: namely, exploring new intellectual areas and socializing in a casual atmosphere. What you hear in this grumbling is the faint echo of a chord that grows stronger through the four grueling years of medical school and the 100-hour weeks of clinical internship. It's the common justification for physicians' tendency to be preoccupied with material rewards: I've sacrificed the best years of my life to get that M.D., and I'm *entitled* to wealth and social status.

Phil Schoenfeld, a senior at Penn, has already been accepted by Penn Medical School. He has a reputation for having taken no prisoners in the library. "I was probably the most grade-conscious person in the university," Schoenfeld says with a smirk. "It's easy to be a little bit calm about it now, but I was nastier then. That was a difficult period to go through." On the outlook of those with whom he has competed for four long years, Schoenfeld says, "There's a feeling you get that some of them think the world owes them something. . . .It does change a fair number of people."

Nurturing the nightmare

Who is to blame for the premed mess?

The medical schools often blame the colleges, which in turn complain that it's the medical admissions officials who set all the rules. Both argue that students suffer from self-induced paranoia. There is some truth in all three explanations.

Little need be said about professors who aggravate premeds' misery by singling them out for

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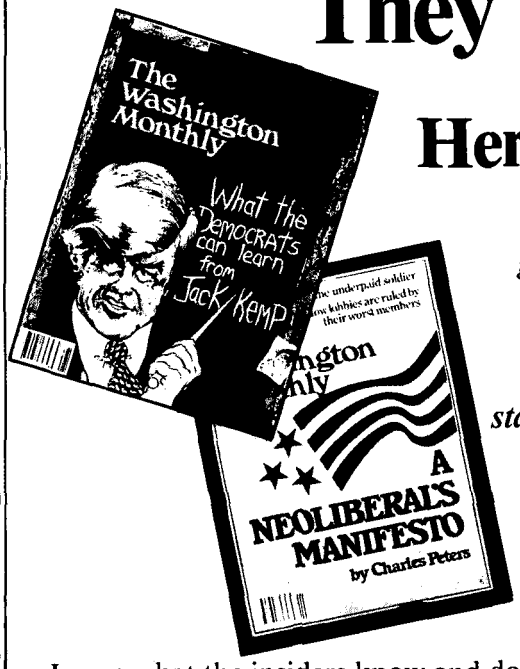

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especially harsh treatment. That such behavior is widely recognized, but continues unchecked at places like Penn, demonstrates the spinelessness of college administrators.

More complicated is the question of why organic chemistry, among other weeders, continues to dominate the lives of people who have no interest in being chemists. The chemistry departments claim that, in effect, they provide a service to the medical schools, which use the course as a screening device. But the chemists have an interest of their own in seeing organic chemistry retain this role. "Without the premeds," says Frederick Brutcher, "we'd be decimated. We'd be shot to pieces." Brutcher estimates that in a class of 140, he will have 15, perhaps 20, aspiring chemists, engineers, and biologists. If premeds didn't have to take organic, guess whose budget would suffer?

Paul Elliott, director of student programs for the American Association of Medical Colleges and a former medical school admissions officer and premed adviser, puts it bluntly: "The chemists have it all figured out that the way they maintain their livelihoods at the major university is by teaching premeds, so they've kept [organic chemistry] there as the entry course, the flunk-out course. . . .and they keep it hard."

Outside of the academic realm, colleges' preprofessional advising offices contribute to undergraduate fanaticism about getting into medical school. Staffed by professional counselors, who usually are not professors, these offices advise students on how to mesh their academic programs with employment strategies in fields such as medicine, law, and banking. At a large institution like Penn, career planners argue that this assistance is crucial because students have little direct contact with their professors. Carol Dugan, who advises Penn premed students, receives high marks from students for her enthusiastic interest in their concerns. However, at least some of her attitudes reinforce the worst aspects of the premed syndrome. For example, as she explains it, college sounds like a four-year endurance test: "The assumption is that if you can handle these academic and psychological demands at each stage where we put a little more on you, then you'll be able to handle the ultimate demand—when you've got somebody's life in your hands. . . .There are connections: How you deal with stress, what kind of confidence you have in your own particular abilities . . . .how you function with less sleep than the normal human being gets." This message plays directly on the premed nightmare of inhuman competitors who study 22 hours a day.

Regardless of the counselors' rhetoric, there is considerable pressure on students to seek their guidance and affection. If you're not being counseled on med school, law school, or business school, there's a sense that you're being left behind. "As soon as I got [to Penn]," says Phil Schoenfeld, "I figured I had better get an appointment" at the premed offices. "You just pick up that that's the thing to do." A former New York University undergraduate now in her second year at Mt. Sinai Medical School says that NYU premeds assume that "if you don't get to know [the premed adviser], he won't help you, and you won't get in."

Carole Horn of George Washington University defends the need for campus advising services, especially for students from less privileged backgrounds who may need extra encouragement to apply to professional schools. "But the negative side," she says, "is that it tends to perpetuate whatever premed mold that particular place has decided is appropriate, and people who don't fit into that mold get discouraged very easily. Probably, that's why we don't get more interesting applicants."

Premed advisers such as Dugan staunchly deny that they push students to adhere to preconceived standards. Yet there is evidence that bureaucratic self-interest may influence the type of advice students at some schools receive.

Madeleine Joullie, one of Fred Brutcher's colleagues in the Penn chemistry department, says that students often tell her of premed coaching motivated largely by a desire to put a high percentage of Penn applicants into top medical schools. "There are people. . .who will tell students: 'Take this because you can get an A. Stay away from this course because it's taught by X, who grades tough.' . . .We encourage [the premed syndrome] rather than try to break it up." David Alexander, president of Pomona College, has written about a "grim cycle" in which colleges pressure students to take only the safest routes to professional school: "Admission ratios to medical schools," he explains, "have come to be a kind of institutional SAT for assessing the relative academic success of colleges and universities."

Paul Elliott of the American Association of Medical Colleges says advisers routinely pay less attention to students who seem to be long shots for admission to medical school, whether it's

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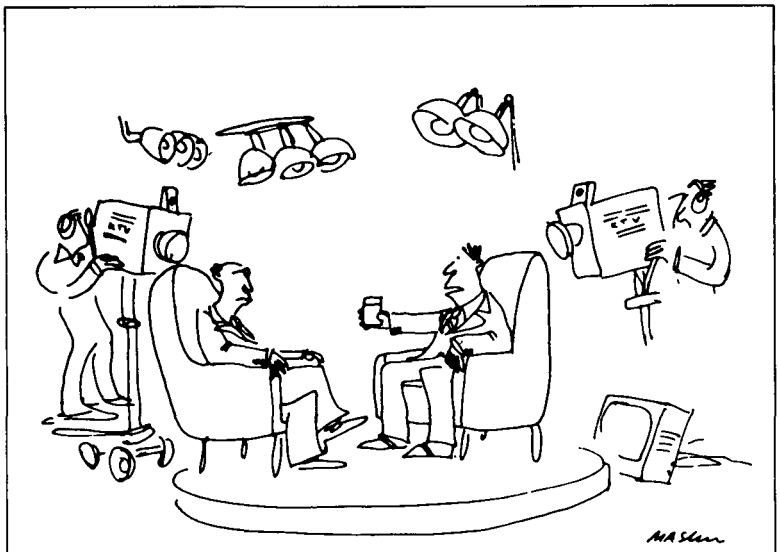

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'Speaking as a premed adviser, there's a necessity to maintain your job and your role. When a student doesn't quite fit the mold, your tendency is not to help him.'

because they have a few bad grades freshman year or because they are following an unconventional premed curriculum. "Speaking as a premed adviser about my profession," says Elliott, "there's...the necessity to maintain your job and your role. One of the ways you do that is by being successful in getting students admitted ....When a student goes outside you and gets admitted, that makes you look kind of funny. When a student comes in who doesn't quite fit the mold you know can get in, your tendency is not to help him to find a way to get in, but...to say, 'Well, gee, I don't think you're going to make it.'...The bureaucracies of premed advisers are like bureaucracies anywhere else—they can be self-supporting and self-serving."

Elliott says statistics compiled by the AAMC back him up. According to the group's research, no college has higher than a 70 percent success rate with its medical school applicants. Harvard and Stanford are the leaders, Elliott says, although the AAMC refuses to release the exact figures. But many schools advertise applicant success rates far higher than 70 percent. Penn, for example, claims 85 percent; Brown University, 95 percent. "The reason for the disparity," says Elliott, "is not that the schools are lying. It's that they're only counting the [students] who come through the committee. They refuse to count students whom they won't write [letters of recommendation] for or who choose not to be written for."

Clearly, the support of premed advisers helps applicants. But the tendency to exclude students who do not cooperate with the advisers only adds to the frantic rush to join the premed mob as early as possible. It can also shut out of the profession many young people who might make exemplary practicing doctors, even though they have difficulty with the arcana of organic chemistry.

Admittedly, medical school wouldn't provoke nearly so much undergraduate anxiety were it not for the fear and desperation students themselves bring to the premed drama. "Undergraduates are getting premed from mommy and daddy," says Fred Brutcher, who periodically receives worried phone calls from parents concerned that a midterm slip-up will crush their aspirations for the premed in the family. Sabrina Eaton dropped out of the Penn premed marathon after landing an F in freshman chemistry. In a recent column for the student newspaper, *The Daily Pennsylvanian,* she recounted her family's reaction: " 'What do you mean, you don't want to go to med school? You always wanted to be a doctor,' Grandpa protested. I explained that just because I'd wanted to be a doctor in fifth grade didn't mean that medicine was my life's calling.... Grandpa would not be persuaded.... His voice became quiet and grave. 'Tell me the truth, Sabrina. Have you been taking drugs?' " Although it might not help, there would at least be some justice in forcing such hecklers on the home front to themselves suffer through a year of organic chemistry.

In their own image

The most obvious and powerful causes of the premed syndrome are the medical school admissions committees. These bodies, generally made up of 20 or 30 physicians, scientific researchers, administrators, and sometimes medical students, hand down the academic standards received by undergraduates as commandments etched in stone. A brief sketch of the history of medical school admissions requirements helps explain the current situation.

Through the early 1900s, most medical schools would admit any warm body they could get their hands on, regardless of whether the enrollee had attended college or had had basic scientific training. It was a question of economics: many of the schools operated simply as profit-making sidelines for doctors, who charged fees for largely

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unenlightening lectures that purportedly augmented training conducted by means of an apprentice system. During the 1910s, a wave of reform swept over the medical education business, forcing many medical school proprietors to concede that some basic college courses in biology, chemistry, and physics would probably improve their pupils. Scientific advances, requiring substantial overhead for laboratory facilities, combined with the spirit of the Progressive Era to close down most of the proprietary medical schools by 1930.

The deans and professors took great pride in their new concern for quality. "They arrived at certain predictors [of future academic success] which were heavily emphasized," explains Dr. Gert H. Brieger, a medical historian at the Johns Hopkins University. For example, standardized medical school entrance exams—now called the MCATs—gained acceptance in the 1930s. Medical schools began to use the exams and courses such as organic chemistry as indicators of applicants' mettle. Medical educators, says Brieger, "got the idea that by predicting who would be a good medical student, they would also predict who would be a good doctor."

Competition for spots in medical schools heightened in the years after World War II. As medicine became more sophisticated, doctors' social status improved, and the profession became far more attractive to top students. Billions of dollars in federal aid each year helped finance research facilities and teaching hospitals. Increasingly, reputations were made on laboratory breakthroughs and development of new technology and surgical procedures. Medical school professors became only part-time teachers, committed primarily to their academic work and lucrative specialized practices.

To the specialist-scholars of the great medical research centers, rigid academic requirements affirmed their elevated self-image. Only the toughest students would survive the brutal training of medical school. Since organic chemistry, for example, sorted the men from the boys when it came to library stamina, it remained a key weeding tool. Likewise, preparation for the multiple-choice MCAT became a major component of premed life.

Brieger points out that since the advent of strict academic admissions standards, a minority of educators periodically have expressed concern that the doctors were encouraging undergraduates to distort their college curricula to please the medical schools. Nevertheless, admissions policies have remained essentially unchanged. In addition to the MCAT, medical schools almost uniformly require about ten courses in basic biology, chemistry, physics, and math. On top of that, most schools recommend a long list of higher-level science courses, which students "will find it to their advantage" to take, as the Penn School of Medicine delicately phrases it. The problem with this presentation is that students tend to interpret "suggestions" as simply requirements in code: If you *really* want to get in, kiddo, take genetics, embryology, and immunology.

Admissions officials respond that they have begun to stress to undergraduates that they desire applicants with broad liberal arts educations. Nonscience majors are welcome, say the medical schools, as long as they have fulfilled the basic science requirements. Most important, the medical schools claim that they seek students who have carefully considered whether they want to be physicians.

Undergraduates, however, react with tremendous cynicism when asked about the medical schools' pronouncements about breadth and variety. As Steve Kolenik puts it, "You wonder whether they mean it. Sure, they'll take a philosophy major, but you won't be the one. You take the better bet, which is what other people are doing."

According to Dr. Norman D. Anderson, dean of admissions at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, premeds have little reason to trust most medical school rhetoric about seeking well-rounded applicants. A student of medical school policy who has written on the topic, Anderson says that "more than 90 percent of [admissions committees] use some sort of computerized operation to screen their applicant pool. They look at the numbers: the GPA, the science GPA, and the MCAT. . . .To get an interview, you have to survive the competitive numbers test, which is, as most students assume, heavily weighted toward science." Premeds aren't dumb, says Anderson, just scared. They see what's going on when students who are anything but well rounded are accepted, while great humanitarians with glitches in their records get bounced.

Anderson does not argue that C students or lit majors necessarily make better doctors than ace biology concentrators. "Taking a few humanities courses doesn't make a future physician more humane," he notes. But on the other hand, suc-

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'Most doctors are very narrow. They select people for medical school because they've been through the same thing.'

cess in organic chemistry doesn't mean a student has much imagination as a scientist, let alone promise as a doctor. Dr. John M. Rhoads, a professor of psychiatry at the Duke University Medical Center, has examined the question of what medical schools get when they admit students who have excelled in the basic sciences. His conclusion echoes that of Gert Brieger's study of medical school admissions reform in the early 1900s. Now, as then, the medical schools select for good medical students, not necessarily good physicians. Rhoads demonstrated that in his sample of 323 Duke medical students there was no correlation between unusual achievement in basic science courses and excellence in the clinical portion of the medical school curriculum. Further, he found that about 70 percent of the students who excelled in the clinical sciences had not done well in the basic science area. "Motivation was the key," Rhoads explains. "Doing well in organic chemistry shows that you have motivation for a grade. It doesn't show you have motivation to treat patients."

Physicians are at the practicing end of science, and it makes perfect sense for medical schools to admit biology majors. There is also nothing wrong with seeking students with good grades and top board scores. But by placing overwhelming weight on grades and standardized tests, the admissions committees avoid the difficult problem of trying to choose students who would make good doctors, not just GPA jocks.

There seem to be several interrelated reasons why the admissions committees stubbornly maintain this approach. For one thing, says Gert Brieger, "it's a lot simpler than worrying about the complicated question of who will be a good doctor." Second, it's safer: medical schools fear that if they admit someone who hasn't survived labors such as organic chemistry, the student may struggle and possibly fail in medical school. Third, medical school professors feel a sense of affinity with the premed who may not have broadened himself much in college, but who really beat his brains out in organic. Derek Bok of Harvard has helped explain the sources of this attitude: In all professions, educational policy is shaped to fit the prevailing self-image of practitioners. Business schools instill "the administrative point of view," while law schools teach students "to think like lawyers"—finding legalistic complications in every human setting and marshaling arguments for both sides of a confrontation.

Medicine has its own notions of what it takes "to think like a doctor." "In a profession that emphasizes scientifically determined findings," Bok wrote recently, ". . . [medical] professors are inclined to impart knowledge didactically, as truths to be described rather than problems to be discussed. Matters outside the domain of science command little attention." It follows that in admissions, the applicant with straight As in the sciences would seem irresistible to physicians who have spent their careers in academic medicine. To some degree, these professor-researchers "are trying to reproduce themselves," says Dr. John Kastor, chairman of the Department of Medicine at the University of Maryland. "Most docs are very narrow. They select people [for medical school] because they've been through the same thing." Products of the premed machine favor kids pressed from the same mold.

Dare to daydream

In his 1978 *New England Journal of Medicine* article, "How to Fix the Premedical Curriculum," Dr. Lewis Thomas, head of the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, placed most of the blame for the premed syndrome on the medical school admissions committees. He proposed a series of fanciful policy changes, including: "Any applicant who is self-labeled as a 'premed,' distinguishable by his course selection from his classmates, will have his dossier placed in the

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third stack of three. Membership in a 'premedical society' will, by itself, be grounds for rejection. Any college... maintaining offices for people called 'premedical advisers' will be excluded from recognition by medical schools."

A measure of Thomas's irreverence will be needed to shake up the medical school establishment and improve the education of future doctors. The first step should be for medical schools to require a minimum of essential science courses, and, whenever possible, these should be part of the core curriculum that college students usually must take. The practice of recommending additional science courses beyond the basics should end. Instead, the medical schools should encourage students to pursue original research in whatever academic field they desire, with special weight given to projects requiring cooperative work.

The aim here is not only to permit a premed the time and energy to take up classical Greek. More important, medical schools must strive for ways to free students from the hysterical premed herd mentality, with its often damaging competitiveness. Undergraduates headed for medical school should be able to blend in with the general student body, where the sense of competition is more diffuse and where they might find themselves interested in a subject just because it is interesting.

While some major medical schools, such as Penn, say they are reassessing their admissions requirements, others have accepted students before their senior year in college in an attempt to relieve some of the tension in the admissions process. Schools such as Northwestern and Brown admit exceptionally bright students directly from high school. These students take an accelerated curriculum combining liberal arts and medical courses. But whatever pressure this strategy may remove for a handful of students, it has the negative effect of isolating an elite set of smarty-pants who may miss out on the wide range of personal experiences that future doctors should enjoy. Accelerated programs may also push the premed syndrome back into the high schools, starting the hyper-competition at age 15 or 16. The percentage of students heavily influenced by their parents' vicarious ambitions must be very high among these young admittees.

A modified version of the early admission scheme, however, has proved promising at a few schools. Johns Hopkins, for example, has for two years admitted some students during their junior year in college. To qualify for early admission (which eliminates use of the MCAT), students must propose an unusual senior year curriculum of advanced work in the humanities or social sciences, original scientific research, or study abroad. Moreover, if their projects require more than a couple of semesters, students may defer entrance to medical school for up to three years after graduating from college. By rewarding originality and breadth, Johns Hopkins actually helps improve undergraduate education and sends a direct signal to students that conventional premed strategies aren't the only way to succeed.

George Washington and several other schools encourage applications from older people as another way to undermine the premed syndrome. Medical schools generally favor applicants coming straight from college, says Carole Horn of GW, because "there's a cynical point of view that [the person who's been out of college for a few years] probably wanted to apply to medical school earlier or did apply and didn't get in." Rather than reward people who gain postgraduate experience and perhaps weigh their applications more carefully, most medical schools question the older applicants' dedication to the profession, Horn says.

Common sense would indicate that more mature people should be choice candidates, especially if they have involved themselves in activities demonstrating humane concerns: community service, the Peace Corps, or public school teaching, for example. John Kastor entered NYU Medical School at age 26, after five years of working in television broadcasting. "For me it was perfect," he says. "I had another career which I look back on with great sentimentality. I hope I'm a better doc because I was exposed to more." An additional benefit of medical schools' admitting more people who decide on medicine later in life is that college students would feel less urgency to declare themselves premed during freshman orientation week.

Such efforts will not, of course, end competition for spots in medical school. As long as everyone can't get in, there will have to be a few tears. But if premeds were encouraged to consider forms of post-college life other than medical school, fewer of them might view the admissions race as a life-or-death affair. For a few years they might even dare not to be pre-anything while they read a few books, tool around a bit in the lab, and contemplate the breadth of experiences available out there in the real world. ■

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What's Wrong with Life Insurance

by Philip M. Stern

One of the most widely sold products in America—we'll call it Product X—has the following characteristics:

- The average customer must pay $1 to get 14 cents' worth of Product X.
- The average customer is oblivious to that because Product X, unlike most consumer products, carries no price tag, sticker, or label; nor do the sellers of Product X advertise their prices.
- Because consumers have no way of knowing the price of Product X, some may pay twice as much for Product X as their next-door neighbors.
- By far the most expensive variety of Product X is offered only to the very poor, and they buy $1.5 billion of it every year.
- Product X is so ill-suited to buyers' needs that, even though it's sold as a product-for-a-lifetime, within two years one customer in four decides he has made a mistake and discards it.

In spite of all this, two out of three Americans have bought Product X. They spend an average of a week's wages each year paying for it. Annual sales: $50 billion.

Product X is life insurance.

Clearly, a massive amount of hornswoggling is going on, and it is vividly described in Ronald Kessler's lucid and much-needed new book.* The basic scam is fairly straightforward. For $155, a man of 32 can buy a policy from Metropolitan Life that will pay his family $100,000 upon his death. But chances are nine out of ten he'll be talked into buying a policy that, for the same $155, carries a death benefit of just $8,055.

It's an oft-told tale—although, judging from the sales figures, not oft enough. The first kind of insurance is "term" insurance. It works just like fire insurance: if you die (or your house burns down) that year, the company pays. If not, you buy a new policy the next year. The second kind is called "whole life." It's a mixture of insurance and investment—and a poor value on both counts. For each dollar of premiums paid, the average return is 14 cents in death benefits and 27 cents in dividends. Forty-one cents on the dollar.

Why such a low return? One major reason, Kessler says, is "sheer waste"—primarily a horrendously costly sales mechanism. "The fundamental problem," he says, is that the industry "is selling a product that no one wants." Consequently, unlike most salesmen, the insurance peddler must go to the customer, not vice versa. What's more, since one out of four customers drops his lifetime policy after only two years, salesmen constantly have to root out new buyers.

If whole life policies are so unsuited to customers' needs, why do people go on buying them? What is interfering with the Ronald Reagan/Adam Smith free-market forces? The principal cause is what I call non-competition by obfuscation. Insurance companies throw so many complex variables into their whole life policies that they make price comparison virtually impossible—even to the most sophisticated and curious consumer. Kessler's Exhibit A is Dr. James Magner, a research physician at the National Institutes of Health, who explores the molecular structure of hormones for a living and is, therefore, accustomed to analyzing complex data. In his effort to be "an intelligent consumer," Magner wrote to two life insurance companies requesting price information. He got back a bewildering set of numbers that defied comparison. "It was inscrutable," Magner told Kessler. So Dr. Magner did what most helpless insurance buyers do: he bought from someone he knew—in this case, his sister-in-law. She sold him a whole life policy costing five times what a term policy with the same death benefits would have cost.

Industry leaders deny it, but the reason insurance salesmen push whole life rather than term is simple: money. Kessler describes how Robert A. Beck, chairman of Prudential, in the course of a smooth-as-silk appearance on the Phil Donahue show, denied "strongly and unequivocally" that the Pru's commission structure en-

Philip M. Stern is a Washington writer. He has covered the life insurance industry for The Washington Post *and is author of* The Rape of the Taxpayer.

**The Life Insurance Game.* Holt, Rinehart and Winston, $16.95.

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couraged its salesmen to push whole life in preference to term insurance. In fact, Kessler says, a Prudential agent selling $100,000 of whole life gets a first-year commission of $740, compared to one of $78 for selling the same amount of term insurance. Little wonder that only one-fifth of Prudential's premium dollars come from term insurance.

Kessler explains that insurance companies use the higher premiums on whole life policies to make investments for themselves. He adds that for the companies, investment profits "account for twice as much return on the dollar as death benefits" (the product the company is *supposedly* in business to sell).

Kessler also offers evidence that the obfuscation is no accident. He quotes Francis E. Ferguson, chairman of Northwestern Mutual, tenth largest in the country: "Life insurance companies make the policies more complex to make it difficult to compare the price[s]. It's never really said; I don't think anybody [in the industry] in his right mind would say it." And in 1983, Richard S. Schweiker, president of the American Council of Life Insurance, warned an audience of insurance salesmen, "We can't assume that we are safe from [consumer] scrutiny because of seemingly impenetrable jargon or forms or actuarial tables."

As Schweiker, a former U.S. senator and secretary of health and human services, suggests, sheer complexity can conceal many wrongs. A ghetto youth caught breaking a store window to steal a TV set will go to prison. His crime is simple and visible. A group of corporate executives caught in a smoke-filled room conspiring to fix prices in their industry could also be jailed, so straightforward is their violation of the antitrust laws. But merely by cloaking their activity with overwhelming intricacy, insurance industry leaders have achieved precisely the same anticompetitive result, with impunity.

Schweiker can take comfort from the secrecy that shrouds life insurance practices. For example, Computone, Inc., an Atlanta-based computer data company that *does* generate meaningful insurance price comparisons, provides the information to life insurance companies and agents. But to get the facts you have to own a $3,000 Computone terminal and know secret access codes. Consumers stay out. Moreover, many of the largest companies will submit their figures to Computone only on the condition that they will not be disclosed to their competitors. Worst of all, Computone conceals its price comparisons

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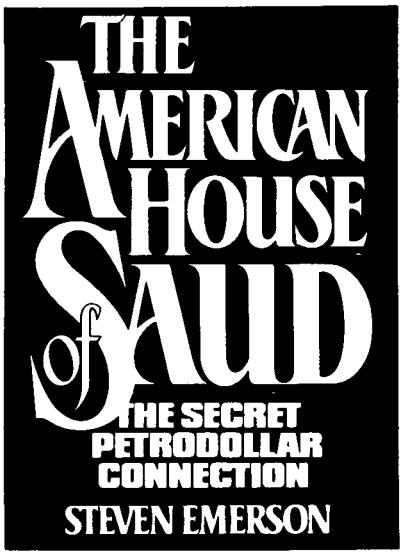
—**Howard Metzenbaum,** *U.S. Senator*



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from state insurance commissioners, whose mission is to protect consumers and keep the industry in check.

This underscores Kessler's most important point: insurance companies are to an extraordinary degree accountable to no one—not to public regulators, not to the press, not to their owners, and, as we have seen, least of all to their customers.

Let's start with the feebleness of government regulation. Other financial institutions—banks and securities traders, for example—are subject to federal curbs. But not the mighty insurance industry, with its $50 billion in annual sales and its $600 billion in amassed wealth. Congress saw to that in 1945 when it handed over insurance regulation to the states. As a result, Kessler says, "companies with assets of tens of billions of dollars are supervised by state insurance departments that barely have enough people to answer their own telephones." According to Kessler, this disparity, plus swiftly revolving doors (a third of the state insurance commissioners come *from* the industry and a third leave *for* jobs with insurance companies), result in the companies "mak[ing] the rules themselves."

Donald G. Maslik, a 20-year veteran insurance salesman who now sells securities as well, told Kessler, "The misrepresentations that go on in [the insurance] business would bring license suspensions or revocations if they were selling stock instead of life insurance. In the insurance industry, the salesman laughs all the way to the bank."

Even more scandalous, the absence of effective state regulation permits the insurance industry to exploit the poor by selling them a special type of coverage known as "industrial" life insurance. These policies cost twice or four times as much as ordinary insurance and yield four times the profits to sellers. The abuse is not new—in 1905, Louis Brandeis called it "legalized robbery." Yet state regulators not only permit it, they require the use of special mortality tables for poor customers, with twice the normal death rate—statistics belied by the abnormally high profits raked in by the companies that sell industrial life policies.

In contrast to the usual run of privately funded environmental and "public interest" groups that monitor other industries, there is, to my knowledge, only one such group that follows insurance—the National Insurance Consumers Organization, a Nader offshoot with a staff of two. That tiny organization keeps watch over the entire spectrum of insurance: auto, property, and casualty, as well as the gigantic life insurance industry.

Life insurance companies are also astonishingly free from press scrutiny. Kessler observes that in the past decade, *Newsweek* has mentioned the insurance industry in only 116 stories, compared to 2,791 references to banks. Kessler's own experience is a case in point. At the outset he says, "This book began as a project for *The Washington Post*," where Kessler has been a reporter since 1970. But that single sentence glides over the fact that the *Post*, after assigning him to probe the industry periodically over a three-year period, failed to print more than a snippet from the series of articles he wrote. In an interview, Kessler said his editors told him that his reporting "didn't lend itself to a newspaper series," that the material wasn't interesting enough. Judging from his book, however, there was no shortage of headline material—the startling fact, for example, that a dollar of premiums yields only 14 cents of death benefits.

Life insurance companies are also unsually well insulated from their owners. The largest companies are mutuals, owned, in theory, by their policyholders. Their management is self-perpetuating. A lone Metropolitan Life policyholder, one Lawrence Cohen, observed some years ago that his premium notices said he and other policyholders had the right to vote for directors. He tried to become a candidate himself, but to do so he had to communicate with his fellow owners. Kessler relates Cohen's Catch-22 frustrations in battling a battery of Metropolitan lawyers *and* the New York Insurance Department in his efforts to obtain the policyholder list. Ultimately, he withdrew his petition and asked for permission to speak at the annual meeting. He was told Metropolitan held no annual meeting.

Finally, as long as insurance buyers are kept in the dark about comparative prices, the industry will remain unaccountable to its customers. Kessler asks, "Why would consumers spend $50 billion a year for a product they blindly purchase without shopping for the best prices? And why do nine in ten consumers take the agent's recommendation and buy whole life?" Answer: they don't know—and can't find out—how much they're paying. Kessler points out that when insurance companies have to compete with other industries on the basis of discernible prices—in the sale of individual retirement accounts, for example—they "usually flounder."

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Kessler sets forth various ways of beating "the insurance game"—but notice how in each case the industry has succeeded in building tight fences around competitive alternatives:

- *Savings bank life insurance.* The bank advertises, and the customer goes to the seller rather than vice versa. But thanks to life insurance industry lobbying, savings banks in only three states—New York, Massachusetts, and Connecticut—may offer life insurance, and then with a ceiling of $50,000 per policy.
- *Expansion of group life insurance.* As with savings bank insurance, life insurance lobbyists have succeeded in getting states to limit such policies to 2.5 times an employee's annual salary.
- *Selling pure term insurance by mail.* When ITT Life Insurance embarked on such a campaign, it received a number of mailed threats from insurance agents of other companies ("We shall be looking for you. [Signed,] N.Y. Life" and "We at Metropolitan tell how ITT prostitutes our profession").

Kessler's book, by his own admission, is short on "how-to's." The topic "How to Buy Life Insurance" is confined to a brief and generally unhelpful appendix. While other appendices contain some bland, aggregate statistical information ("The Top 20 Insurance Companies," for example), there is no ranking of the prices various companies charge for a commonly sold kind of insurance policy—the very information Kessler correctly argues is essential to introduce competition into the industry.

The book is also thin on public policy solutions to the life insurance problem. The experts seem to agree on one point, though: significant reforms hinge on Congress reasserting federal control of this $600 billion industry. The prospects for that, however, are negligible, judging from Congress's veto of a Federal Trade Commission probe of the insurance industry in the late 1970s. According to Kessler, Aetna Insurance, whose chairman had spearheaded the industry drive to kill the study, "showed up the worst in the FTC's confidential rankings of the costs of 200 policies."

But if Kessler's book is short on solutions, it stands as a powerful, well-documented indictment of the life insurance industry. That indictment may be summed up in this single fact: When all is said and done, the average amount paid out in death benefits—purportedly to care for the insured's loved ones for the remainder of their days—is $5,068, "barely enough," as Kessler puts it, "to pay for a funeral." ■

A Lonely Crusade for Classroom Standards

by Phillip Keisling

Over the last 15 years, Diane Ravitch has been the kind of educational commentator that the left has loved to hate. Long before the National Commission on Excellence in Education warned of a rising tide of mediocrity, Ravitch had lambasted self-styled school reformers (most of them political liberals) for debasing academic standards in the name of "educational relevance." At a time when unalloyed support for school busing was the litmus test for one's enlightenment on racial issues, Ravitch pointed out the not-so-subtle racism inherent in the assumption that white students could learn just fine on their own but black students couldn't. As the courts increasingly relied on sociological studies to determine the "optimal" mix for student learning, Ravitch also lampooned the absurdity of this approach—illustrated, for example, by the ruling of federal Judge Arthur Garrity of Boston that any school that departed more than 10 percent from the city-wide black-white pupil ratio of 61-to-32 percent was legally "segregated." Ravitch also drew the scorn of the Hispanic community by describing bilingual education for what it too often has been in practice: an attempt by special-interest groups to enlist the courts and the federal government on behalf of a specific pedagogical method that does little for students' real educational needs but a great deal for the careers of bureaucrats and Spanish-speaking teachers.

To read Ravitch's collected essays* is to take a rather harrowing tour of the numerous intellectual cul-de-sacs and dangerous back alleys that public educators have frequented for much of the last two decades. Most disturbing, Ravitch's research reveals the nation's public schools as part of a subtle, yet invidious class conspiracy. But this is not the same conspiracy described by radical

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**The Schools We Deserve: Reflections on the Educational Crises of Our Times.* Basic Books, $19.95.

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historians of the 1960s, who asserted that traditional formal schooling was a ploy by the Establishment to stifle creativity and turn children into obedient cogs for the capitalist machine. Rather, the conspiracy involves not oppressive, autocratic schools but horrendously *bad* schools. By turning out millions of high school graduates incapable of even reading Marx, much less being moved to class warfare by his words, the nation's public schools help ensure that the sons and daughters of the powerful and well-to-do have that much less competition.

Ever the cautious historian, Ravitch refrains from making this case explicity, though she should have. It is neither a particularly new nor an original argument. While it is true that bad schools do the most damage to poor and minority students in the inner cities, it's also true that those students have never received an adequate education. The students who *have* suffered a relative loss are the great mass of students in the middle: predominantly white, of moderate intelligence and motivation, and overwhelmingly middle class. On a standard Bell distribution curve, they're the large bulge with the B and C averages. A good portion of them will go from high school to a community college or public university; most will wind up in respectable jobs as nurses, computer operators, sales clerks, teachers.

Yet how "educated" are these citizens? What do their high school and college diplomas really represent? A 1980 report by the National Science Foundation warned of a "current trend toward virtual scientific and technological illiteracy." Little wonder, as 35 states require only one year of mathematics and science—and little wonder that the U.S. seems to be losing so much ground to foreign competitors in fields such as applied engineering. In the humanities, Ravitch notes, the serious study of history has all but disappeared, even in some of the best high schools. In New York City, a teacher can be licensed to teach "social studies" without having taken a single history course in college. Less than 15 percent of all high school students study a foreign language, and only 6 percent do so for more than two years. That might be excusable, though still somewhat parochial, if high school graduates at least could speak and write fluently in their native English. But such skills are also following a downward spiral. Remedial writing courses have become one of the biggest growth industries in higher education; Ravitch cites one major state university where half of the freshmen were enrolled in such courses.

These horror stories should be familiar by now. The important question, as Ravitch puts it, is, "What's going on here?" One very important answer is something known as "general education."

Most public high schools now "track" their students, steering them into one of three programs: academic, vocational, or general education. The first two categories are self-explanatory. The college-bound students in the former tend to take courses such as calculus, chemistry, and advanced placement English. Those in the latter spend most of their time in pursuits such as woodshop, accounting, or on-the-job training.

"General education," certainly the most ambiguous of the three tracks, is where most of the action's been in our public schools lately. Between 1964 and 1979, Ravitch notes, the proportion of students enrolled in general education more than tripled, from 12 to 40 percent. Meanwhile the proportion of students in the academic track dropped considerably, to only 34 percent. What kind of courses are students in the general track taking? According to the National Commission on Excellence in Education, "Twenty-five percent of the credits earned by general-track high school students were in physical and health education, work experience outside the school, remedial English and mathematics, and personal service and development courses such as training for adulthood and marriage."

Not surprisingly, high school educators have vigorously defended this proliferation of the "generally educated." Students should not be forced to take dry, academic courses for which they probably will have no use in the real world, the argument goes. Schooling should match students' aspirations. They should be given freedom of choice in shaping their curricula. And isn't it better that students stay in school rather than drop out in response to repressive and demanding requirements?

Ravitch has little patience with such educational relativism, under which a course in "mass media" has the same credit value as a far more rigorous one in English grammar. "This is like putting people on a diet of 1,800 calories a day without caring whether they are consuming junk food or nutritious food," she notes caustically. Ravitch comes well armed with statistics to refute the fundamental arguments for general education. For example, educators like to point to declining dropout rates, strongly hinting that stiffer standards will reverse this happy trend. But the dropout rate has remained "virtually un-

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changed" since the mid-1960s, Ravitch points out. "It is noteworthy," she adds, "that the dropout rate continued to fall during the post-Sputnik years when rigor and requirements were in fashion." As for falling SAT scores, many educators claim that their steady slide from 1964 to 1983 could be explained by an increasing number of poor and minority students who took the test. Some have gone so far as to suggest that this decline signaled progress, with more and more students aspiring to college education. But the profile of SAT-takers has remained virtually unchanged since 1970, Ravitch notes, and scores have actually fallen *faster* since that date.

Ravitch succeeds in revealing the patronizing nature of liberal prescriptions such as general education and busing. Their implicit messages are clear: most students can't "take" a rigorous curriculum; blacks can't learn without a sufficient number of whites beside them in the classroom; students' egos are so fragile that it is better to "socially promote" them to the next grade even if they haven't mastered their material. Yet as turn-of-the-century Progressives herded the children of immigrants into vocational education, arguing that this was "better" for them than a standard academic program, contemporary liberals have generally succeeded in portraying themselves as sympathetic and enlightened. Meanwhile, those who have urged high standards—and high expectations—for students, regardless of social class, have often been dismissed as pitiless reactionaries.

Although critics such as Ravitch have begun to correct these skewed perceptions, many liberal reformers remain unrepentant. Jonathan Kozol, for example, author of *Death at an Early Age*, excoriated rigid hierarchical schools and urged that students be given responsibility for their own learning. Kozol recently blasted the "back to basics" movement—with which Ravitch has been identified—as "an unsubtle euphemism for a retrogression into basic privileged reward for [the] few and basic heartlessness toward those who are denied the means of access." Yet this perspective suggests no small irony, given that Kozol's latest book, *Illiterate America*, estimates that one-third of the nation's adults are illiterate or nearly so. Rather than acknowledge any link between this problem and the "reforms" he urged a decade ago, Kozol puts the blame on too little use of the open classroom, not too much. In this respect, he is reminscent of the die-hard conservatives who still insist that we could have won the Vietnam war if only we hadn't lost our nerve. They urged a few more bombs; Kozol, in his book, urges an escalation from the liberals' favorite arsenal—a federal appropriation of about $10 billion a year for the next decade.

As Ravitch points out, the public's attention span for school reform historically has been short. Within three months of the report of the National Commission, *Time* proclaimed in a cover story that the "crisis" in education was all but over. On the national level, public debate on education seems moribund. On the state level, where a flurry of recent reform brought merit pay, career ladders, and teacher testing, the momentum may soon subside as powerful interest groups such as the teachers' unions continue to mobilize (see article on page 24).

This is a critical time for educational reform, and for that reason there is one aspect in which this book disappoints. In only one of these essays does Ravitch do any first-hand reporting (a lively profile of New York City's "best" high school). The remaining essays seem to have been written from the relative calm of Ravitch's office at Columbia University. Missing is any sense of immediacy, of Ravitch roaming the hallways and talking to the teachers, administrators, and students who actually inhabit the schools about which she writes. These essays instead resemble classical sculpture: precise, well crafted, but cool to the touch.

Should Ravitch ever decide to augment her impressive research and analytical skills by venturing out to test her theories against reality, the result could be a book as important to understanding where public education has gone astray as Robert Caro's *The Power Brokers* was for understanding urban planning. Such a book would also generate a great deal more excitement than this collection. Ravitch deserves the attention, and our public schools deserve it even more. ■

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POLITICAL BOOKNOTES

With All Disrespect: More Uncivil Liberties. Calvin Trillin. *Ticknor & Fields, $14.95.* Columns are the awkward invention of editors with infinite faith in the compressibility of thought and utter contempt for the patience of readers. They are too short for any significant complexity and apparently too long for the concepts the typical columnist wishes to convey. They often consist of a one-paragraph idea being force-marched through 600 words.

Calvin Trillin, bless him, rises above the limitations of the genre because he is, among other things, an epigrammatist of the first order. In this book of columns, Trillin does not begin with a premise and then beat it to death. He uses the column more as a comfortable environment for his journalistic haiku. In some cases you can't even be certain what the premise of the column was. No matter. Trillin will have given you something worth holding on to.

Few writers can say so much in so little space. At one point his daughter says, "I thought newspaper editors were supposed to be skeptical, Daddy." "Only of people who are not invited to the same dinner parties," Trillin replies, using 12 words to say what other critics of the press have written books about.

His description of Ronald Reagan at a news conference is complete and correct: "He sucks up some facts from the briefing books like a giant turkey baster and then squeezes them out over the Washington press corps."

Or his dissection of the Mid-Life Crisis: "When someone reaches middle age, people he knows begin to get put in charge of things, and knowing what he knows about the people who are being put in charge of things scares the hell out of him." And Trillin can ask the tough questions: "If law school is hard to get through. . . how come there are so many lawyers?"

Trillin writes this sort of thing in *The Nation*, and it must be said in defense of any would-be challengers that not many writers work for publications that allow their columnists to describe their journal as pinko and the sort of magazine where "if you make a photocopy of your piece, the copy is a lot better than the original." How many writers can attack their editors in print for paying them in the "high two figures" or ruminate on how someone named Hamilton Fish III ("with two last names and a number") can get to be publisher of a left-wing magazine? This sort of license clearly frees the spirit.

It should be noted that Trillin is far from the Neo-Carson school of social and political satire. He does not wear you down with a laundry list of one-liners. His humor constantly changes form. Sometimes it is in delicious description, such as that of Rich Creep, the Manhattan megadeal cutter, who "eats breakfast at the Regency, where deals are made so quickly that a careless conglomerateur could find himself swallowing up a middle-sized corporation while under the impression that he was just mopping up his egg yolk with the end of a croissant." He repeatedly calls up images in his mind and gets the wrong number, as when he recounts a series of socially relevant seders, including one at a radical feminist collective "where they refused to recognize the killing of the Egyptians' first-born sons as a curse." And he gratuitously puts words into the mouths of the famous and the fantastic, crediting Charles deGaulle, for example, with the thought that something was "uncool."

Unlike most columnists, Trillin feels no compulsion to prove he is wiser or more in the know than anyone else. Thus it is easier to identify with him. Of course, the final joke is that Trillin is wiser and more in the know than many columnists. Which is one reason to read this book. Another is that you will laugh a lot. And another is that the laughter doesn't die. Trillin leaves the reader in exceptionally good humor.

—*Sam Smith*

Falwell—Before the Millenium: A Critical Biography. Dinesh D'Souza. *Regnery Gateway, $14.95.* Don't take the "critical" in the title too seriously; this is a view of Falwell pretty much as he must see himself. Still, it's nice to find a writer who can calm down about Falwell enough to be able to tell the story of his life. It turns out that Falwell is a first-generation fundamentalist but a second-generation entrepreneur, whose gifts and ambitions as a builder are enormous. Though he's no doubt sincere, whatever holiness there is in him seems dwarfed by his drive. And though he constantly complains about being "misunderstood," it's a fate he has tempted by being outrageous in public. He would say he's made a great personal sacrifice for the cause, but it's clear that the real reason is that he adores the limelight.

D'Souza is right that Falwell and his colleagues on the religious right have changed the terms on which American politics is conducted. Otherwise, his observations are useful more as an example of how the fundamentalists think than as an explanation. What's the deep lode in American life that Falwell has tapped? The official answer—religion and morality—is partly right, but from reading between the lines it's obvious that class has a lot to do with it, too. Resentment of the big-city swells who run everything shines through on every page. A typical passage: "They [TV evangelists] might be wealthy, but they were frank about it. At least they built prayer towers and cathedrals. They didn't drink gin and tonics like the liberal clergymen. They didn't wear tweed coats. They didn't pretend they knew Kierkegaard."

Falwell's and D'Souza's constant defense of the Moral Majority's excesses is, essentially, so's-your-old-man-ism. Okay, Bailey Smith said God does not hear the prayers of the Jew—well, William Sloane Coffin visited the Ayatollah Khomeini! Falwell has a huge self-interest in portraying a few nutty liberals as a

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vast, serried army, just as the left has an interest in making the Moral Majoritarian impulse seem Hitlerian. It makes great sound bites for the evening news. D'Souza has good fun quoting Respectables being horrified about Falwell, but that's the result of a game that Falwell plays to the hilt—he likes to provoke, and he says equally silly things about his critics.

By the way, can we nip a couple of annoying buds here? First, the word "media" is the plural of medium and so agrees with the plural forms of verbs. Certainly D'Souza has lots of company here, but "the media has" and "the media is" are wrong. Second, has anyone else gotten skeptical of authors who claim to have started their books with one bias and in the course of their research become converted to the opposite one? Joan Peters begins her eloquent defense of Israel by claiming she was initially pro-Palestinian; Robert Caro tells interviewers that he wanted his brilliant, devastating biography of Lyndon Johnson to be a puff piece. D'Souza insists he at first had "problems" with Falwell but given that D'Souza has long written for conservative publications and that his publisher is the country's most venerable conservative house, I don't know if I buy it.

Why are we conditioned to admire a changing of the mind and to mistrust long-held conviction?

—*Nicholas Lemann*

Disconnecting Parties: Managing the Bell System Break-Up. An Inside View. W. Brooke Tunstall. *McGraw-Hill, $17.95.* Could the largest bureaucratic reorganization of all time have transpired without generating a single amusing or even interesting anecdote? Apparently, according to this account by W. Brooke Tunstall, an AT&T vice president and top-ranking participant in divestiture planning, whose "inside view" is as fresh and frank as a court stenographer's.

Tunstall gives us page after page of acronyms, committee meeting dates, depth charts, and corporate managers' names, but not the slightest sense that human beings played any role in the process, let alone that there were moments of confusion or introspection. *The really important sentences are in italics to make sure you don't miss them.* For example: "Technological advance cannot dictate industrial policy. *It can, and does, offer policymakers new alternatives and choices.*"

Interspersed are boilerplate quotes from AT&T chieftan Charles Brown, presented in a style that can charitably be described as fawning. Tunstall always refers to him as "Chairman Brown." Those who have heard Brown testify before Congress come away impressed with a witty and multi-dimensional personality; Tunstall manages to make the boss sound like a block of balsa wood.

Given that Tunstall has a self-serving purpose—to praise by inference his own performance during the event—perhaps it should come as no surprise that *Disconnecting Parties* is so bland and scrupulously free of insight. What nagged at me, reading the book, was the fear that no human anecdotes were being related because in truth none had occurred. In the organization Tunstall describes, emotions, jealousies, hopes, and dreams not only play no role, they don't exist. All that exists is occu-

"How does a public leader find just the right word or the right way to say no more and no less than he means to say—

bearing in mind that anything he says may topple governments and involve the lives of innocent men?"

Photo: Courtesy U.P.I

This was one of the questions Lyndon Johnson put to the National Association of Broadcasters on April 1, 1968, the day after he announced that he would not run for reelection.

In LYNDON JOHNSON'S DUAL WAR, Kathleen J. Turner presents an absorbing account of the "other war" that Johnson fought: the struggle to establish rapport with the press, to persuade them to back him up in his handling of the Vietnam war.

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pying the proper chair at the proper meetings properly convened in accordance with the officially sanctioned "managerial process." If that's the way it really is at AT&T, it's the best argument I've heard for breaking the company up.

—*Gregg Easterbrook*

The Trouble with America. Michel Crozier. *Univ. of California Press, $16.95.* The author, a leading French sociologist, has produced a profound analysis of what ails us. In considerable part, his diagnosis is neoliberal. "The social bond," he writes, "that once enabled people to make constructive compromises as well as to accept the sacrifices needed in the long run, is coming undone." He says that the army of today is "no longer the army of Generals George Marshall and Dwight Eisenhower, but an army of callous bureaucrats." He bemoans "the disproportionate influence of lawyers and legal experts in every sphere of activity." He explains how the protection given workers by union contracts can have "perverse effects," which often include putting the rights of the senior members above the interests of the young and the unemployed and the long-range interests of the company and the country.

—*Charles Peters*

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Another War/Another Peace. Ronald Glasser. *Summit, $14.95.* A haunting, heartbreaking story about the war in Vietnam, this is Glasser's best book since *365 Days*, which was excerpted in these pages under the title "The Burn Ward" in April 1971.

—*C.P.*

Lay Bare the Heart: An Autobiography of the Civil Rights Movement. James Farmer. *Arbor House, $16.95.* James Farmer was one of the most remarkable of the many remarkable men and women who led the civil rights movement during the 1960s. A six-foot, broad-shouldered pacifist, Farmer helped pioneer the use of sit-ins to fight segregation in public places. He helped organize the famous Freedom Rides, which integrated intercity bus lines in the South. In one of the more unlikely political appointments of recent times, he served briefly as an assistant secretary of HEW under President Richard Nixon.

He is to this day a marvelous storyteller, with a double bass voice, a laugh that fills rooms, and a natural sense of drama. In *Lay Bare the Heart*, his memoirs, Farmer has set down his best stories on paper. He tells of integrating Chicago coffee houses in the 1940s with Ghandian nonviolence; of the fear he felt rolling towards Mississippi on the Freedom Ride; of how he watched the 1963 March on Washington on TV in a Louisiana jail.

It is a measure of how far we have come that these stories seem like dispatches from another country. Yet Farmer fears that the lessons of the struggle for civil rights are already being forgotten. Several years ago, he writes, he met a young black student at a California college who couldn't quite place the name Martin Luther King.

Andrew Young would not be mayor of Atlanta, nor Harold Washington mayor of Chicago, if people such as James Farmer had not gone before them, leading the way. John Lewis, a black Freedom Rider who is now an Atlanta city councilman, remembers Farmer singing this song in a Jackson, Mississippi jail at night: "Which side are you on, boy, which side are on? I'll be a Freedom Rider, till I'm dead and gone."

—*Peter Grier*

The Transfer of Care: Psychiatric Deinstitutionalization and Its Aftermath. Phil Brown. *Routledge and Kegan Paul, $22.* "Deinstitutionalization is so public a policy and so prominently a failure," in the words of the author, that this *should* be an important book. Phil Brown has made the first full-dress attempt to analyze the mass exodus of chronic mental patients from state mental hospitals to "community settings," a euphemism for nursing homes, board-and-care facilities, single-room occupancy hotels, and, frequently, public shelters and the streets. Deinstitutionalization has been one of the most profound shifts in public policy since World War II, yet has attracted surprisingly little serious analysis, even as hallucinating former state hospital patients crowd our sidewalks and parks. As the author notes, the "sheer numbers are shocking: close to one million mentally disabled persons live in nursing and boarding homes," compared to only one-seventh that number remaining in the state hospitals.

The book contains all the data, to be sure, and it is reasonably well written. Yet it is curiously desiccated—blood and flesh are subsumed by bar graphs and statistics. Perhaps Brown assumed his stance of sociological detachment in an attempt to produce a "respectable" academic tone. Or he may simply lack personal experience with those patients affected by deinstitutionalization. In any case, the book lacks a sense of immediacy.

As a resource book on deinstitutionalization, this is the best we have. But Brown has not provided the impetus for policy changes.

—*E. Fuller Torrey*

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Grave New World. Michael Ledeen. *Oxford University Press, $17.95.* Michael Ledeen is a foreign policy analyst with impeccable conservative credentials: senior fellow at Georgetown's Center for Strategic and International Studies, former editor of *The Washington Quarterly*, former consultant to Alexander Haig and Richard Perle. On the evidence of this confused book, he has lost his faith in the gospel according to *Commentary* but isn't ready to face the world without the ideology on which he has built his career.

Ledeen describes a world growing dangerous because increasingly aggressive smaller countries are raising the risk of accidental superpower confrontation. He attributes this to the unpredictability of American and Soviet foreign policy; without clear signals from Moscow or Washington, other capitals cannot be sure of how far to press their own policies. This unpredictability results, in turn, from the internal incoherence of both superpowers. U.S. domestic politics and the growing power of the media make it impossible for our leaders to design or conduct effective foreign policy, while Soviet leaders are forced by their continuing domestic failures to prove the virtue of communism (and their own rule) through foreign triumphs.

While Ledeen correctly diagnoses the symptom of the growing impact of lesser powers on global politics, he misses the true nature of the disease. Historically, when great powers clash over fundamental ideals and interests, they go to war. Nuclear deterrence and mutual prudence have prevented a war between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. But this, contrary to Ledeen's assertion, makes both superpowers more, not less, predictable and gives other countries room to maneuver and ways to exploit the competition to their own advantage. The anarchy of world politics grows out of superpower stalemate, not unpredictability.

Ledeen gets it wrong because he lacks the courage of his convictions. He consistently retreats from the implications of his analysis to the safety of neoconservative nostrums. American incoherence, he argues, results from nothing more than a loss of "credibility," a hoary idea that prolonged the agony in Vietnam. The notion of Soviet incoherence is incompatible with the neoconservative belief in a grand Kremlin design for world domination. Ledeen insists that such a design exists, even when he timidly offers the heresy that Cuba acted in Africa not as Moscow's proxy but in spite of Soviet misgivings.

For all his own confusion, Ledeen occasionally offers glimpses of his imagination, as in a fanciful proposal that the White House contract out for foreign policy advice. Recruit top former policymakers from abroad, says Ledeen; see if Helmut Schmidt of Germany or Adolfo Suarez of Spain would like to sign on as freelance consultants. Such glimmers of iconoclastic thinking suggest that Ledeen might have written a far more provocative book.

—Gordon Rayfield

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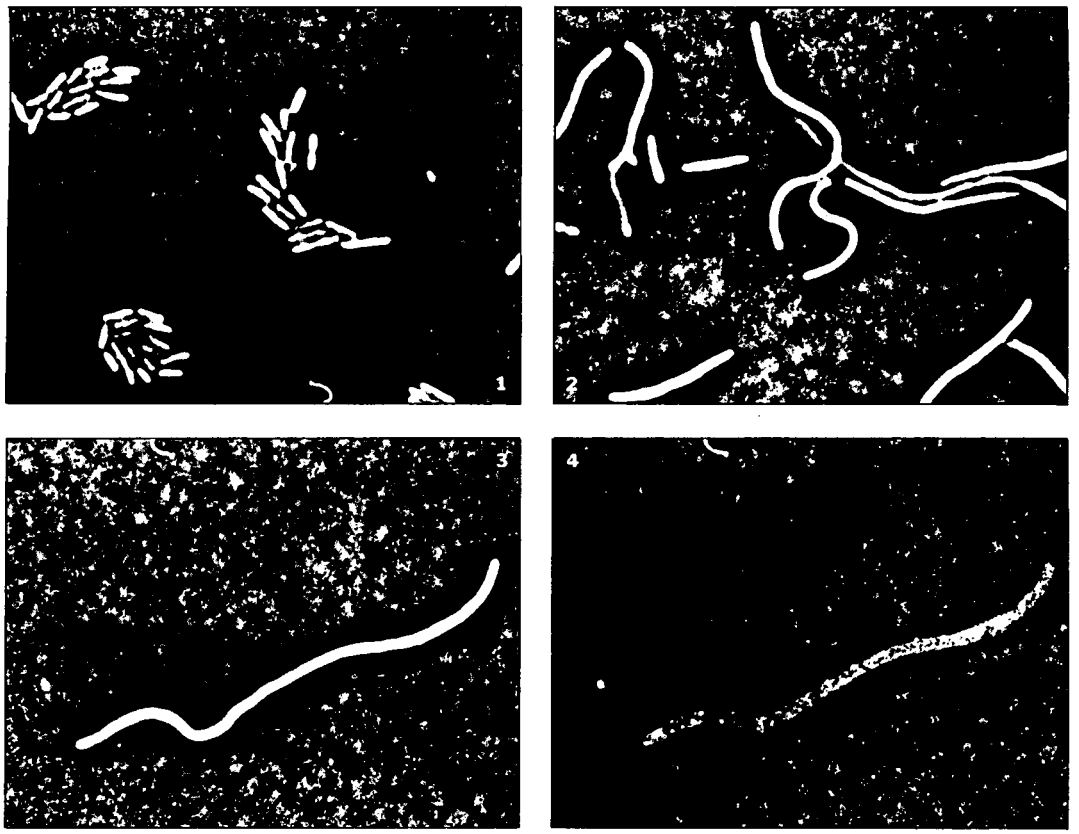

Bacteria in lab dish (1) elongate after addition of piperacillin, a new antibiotic (2); the cell wall of the microorganism weakens (3), then ruptures and dies (4).

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